MACQUARIE University
SYDNEY·AUSTRALIA

Becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* to reform professional femininity: Saudi professional women, identity work and online personal branding

Aayad Ahmed Al Eid

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Macquarie Business School, Department of Management,

Macquarie University, Sydney.

May 2021

“Sisters are angels who lift us up when our wings forget how to fly”

Unknown

To my one and only, wonderful sister Dr. Ashwaq Al Eid

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the identity construction of Saudi professional women through online personal branding in LinkedIn within the collectivist, conservative, and masculine culture of Saudi Arabia. In particular, this thesis analyses the extent to which women are affected by gendered sociocultural contexts. Using a qualitative methodology that draws on in-depth interviews with 39 Saudi female professionals who use LinkedIn, the findings suggest that the ways Saudi women construct their professional identity through online personal branding are driven by the tensions inherent in online identity work and by three other issues. These issues are the impact of sociocultural rules, the domination of guardianship, and the notion of ideal femininity. Also, the present study shows that Saudi professional women use professional identity to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* (marginalised women) to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* (empowered women). Finally, the unique ways of professional identity construction of Saudi women reflect how they reform professional femininity in that they play the role from 'we' as a collective identity to 'we' as change-makers.

This thesis makes key contributions on Middle Eastern women and identity construction. It involves identifying a professional form of identity work through online personal branding in the Middle Eastern context and differentiating social media usage in a professional context for Saudi women. Also, it contributes to the concept of women's empowerment (*Tamkeen Almara'ah*) for Saudi women. The present study reforms professional femininity in its modern and professional form by criticising the traditional concept of the 'ideal Islamic woman'. Thus, professional identity construction for Saudi women through identity work and online personal branding differs from a western context in terms of its meaning and circumstances and reveals Saudi women's needs to overcome online tensions to

move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* in society and reforming the professional femininity to fit professional contexts.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

The thesis has received the approval of the Ethics Review Committee (Human Research) at Macquarie University (Reference number: 5201701181).

Aayad Ahmad Al Eid (43189997)

Candidate's statement about the impact of COVID-19 changes on the thesis

Dear Examiner,

Many of our HDR candidates have had to make changes to their research due to the impact of COVID-19. Below you will find a statement from the candidate, approved by their Supervisory Panel, that indicates how their original research plan has been affected by COVID-19 restrictions. Relevant ongoing restrictions in place caused by COVID-19 will also be detailed by the candidate.

Candidate's Statement:

During Covid-19 I had two small children at home and was home-schooling. This impacted my progress greatly. Further, after my husband finished his PhD he returned to Saudi Arabia and I have been sole-parenting them.

Thesis Title: Becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* to reform professional femininity: Saudi professional women, identity work and online personal branding.

Candidate Name: Aayad Ahmad Al Eid

Department: Management

Personal Acknowledgements

This thesis is part of my journey from my home, Saudi Arabia, to Australia to study and back, and there is a range of people I want to thank.

Thank you to my country, Saudi Arabia, for my scholarship, with all its benefits and opportunities. I am grateful for being *Bint Hatha Al Balad* (the daughter of this country). I would like to admit there were many times I felt distinguished because I am an international student from Saudi Arabia. I hope that, when I return, I can give back what I received throughout this journey.

For my first supervisor, Professor David Rooney, who retyred in the second year of my PhD, I would like to say thank you for the great beginning and because you left me with the wonderful Professor Alison Pullen, who did her best to help. Moreover, I would like to thank Professor Ross Gordon and Dr Candy Lu for all their valuable feedback.

Professor Alison Pullen, I would like to say there are no words that can express my gratitude, only *Anti Da'awat ummy almustagabah, anti rahmah O noor* (You are the result of my mother praying to me). You were the mercy and light during my PhD journey. Having you as a supervisor is a life lesson I will never, ever forget. Your kindness and understanding always supported me to feel well. No matter what was happening, you were always supportive. In every meeting I have ever had with you, whether online during COVID-19 or face to face, your smile is the heroic element that makes me feel everything will be all right. Being a student for a brand name like Alison Pullen is an honour. Thank you very much for being part of my wonderful PhD memories.

Many thanks to all my friends and relatives, who always show their love and support. Thank you to my friend Haneen Alghathami, as she never gets tyred asking about me and my studies and showing her love and support. Thank you to my friend Ashwag Alhunti, who always told me, 'You are a great mum and student', and supported me to be stronger and do my best. Thank you for my friend Meead Alsikhan, who was always there to keep reminding me, 'Tell me if you need anything'. Another thank you will be for my very special friend Maha Alkhamshi, who acted on this journey not just as a friend but also as a life coach, helping me with meditations and consultations to deal with PhD stress and increase the quality of my life.

Since I was a child in my first year of school until my bachelor's studies, when I brought my certificates to my father, he kept saying one sentence after he shows his happens; he was saying, '*Augbal Al Duktorah,* عقبال الدكتوراه' (I wish you a PhD). Look at this *Yubah* (Father)! I finished this thesis and did my best, as you taught me, with enjoyment and much love. Your wish for me since I was young (the PhD) became a life goal that distinguished every aspect of my existence.

Once I would lose my mind and felt the stress I would call my mum, looking for her smile to recharge my energy. She believed in me and would always say one thing whenever I expressed my concern: '*Ma Shallah Alyk, Anti Gadaha*, ما شاء الله عليك انت قدها ' (You can do it for sure). Do you know why I could? Because I am your daughter, who watched your ambition and commitment in life. I take them as a light and road map to guide my life's journey.

For my parents: As a mother, I know what it means to be away from your children, so thank you, because you always believed in me. You both were patient, waiting for my return with the PhD. Thank you for your love, your support, your prayers. I am sorry for the missing moments when I could not be there for you.

For the man in my life, Khaled, no matter what we endured doing our simultaneous PhD studies, we survived. I could not have done it without the support, love and care you always had for me. Think you for taking care of our kids while I was studying at university and all the delicious meals you cooked after a long day of studying. You are a real lifelong companion.

My angels, Reema and Hamad, I write this for you because I know one day you will read it and remember. Being a mother and PhD student is not easy at all, but having you in my life has made it enjoyable and full of love. Since I started my studies, my fate has meant missing unique moments with you. I completed my journey, trying not to miss your years growing and enjoying your lives. I did my best, and we still have more to live with daddy Khaled. Reema, if not for your care, responsibility and unique personality for an eight-year-old girl, I could not have finished this thesis. Hamad, I know my life is great when I see your love, funny behaviour and unique smile, which I call my sunshine.

Since I left my home to study in Australia, my sister contacted me every morning as a first task of the day to ask about me. For you, Shoogty, I thank you for your unconditional love

and support. Thank you because you were always here for me, experiencing all the feelings and emotions that I experienced during my journey. Thank you because you acted not just like a sister, but like Aladdin's lamp in satisfying my wants and needs. I could not have finished this thesis without you; I would not be this person without you. I am the luckiest sister in the world because you are my sister.

Finally, I thank myself for my many attempts to be a better version of myself with every challenge I faced. My acknowledgement of all the ups and downs I faced and felt raised my awareness and shaped my values, which will help me when I return to Saudi Arabia.

This thesis is about my journey to Australia, but also about my return home.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The collectivist, conservative and masculine culture and society of Saudi Arabia have played a role in influencing social and professional lives of Saudi women. From the distant past to the present day, the background of Saudi women impacts every aspect of their lives (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Aljuwaiser, 2018; Alkhaled, 2021; AlMunajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986). This background raises the question of the views and ways of constructing a professional identity for Saudi women. These women have faced challenges in being recognised in society, as they were long restricted to private spaces (AlMunajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986; Altuwayjiri, 2019; Lipsky, 1959). Examining the identity construction of Saudi professional women explores their ways of having a professional identity by analysing their identity work and online personal branding on LinkedIn. This research emphasises the experience of Saudi professional women in terms of identity construction and identifies the identity work during online personal branding as an ongoing process of identity construction. This thesis aims to explore how Saudi professional women construct a professional identity through online personal branding on a professional social media platform. The present research focusses on the influence of the collectivist, conservative and masculine culture, and society in the collective narrative and the performance of professional women, investigating the role of Saudi women in relation to their background and the recent changes in Saudi Arabia in professional identity construction. With respect to the challenges that Saudi women have faced through the years, this research explores professional identity work of women 'as strategy' and personal branding 'as practice' to increase their recognition and visibility professionally by navigating the women's *Tamkeen* (empowerment) and reforming their professional femininity.

This study provides insights into the ways in which Saudi professional women overcome their tensions and understand their experiences of constructing professional identity and clarifies their use of professional social media platforms. Saudi women construct identities while they consider sociocultural and gender matters related to their experiences. Studying Saudi Arabian society and Saudi women with their cultural and social influences has become common, especially given the enormous changes related to the status of women in Saudi Arabian society.

Research on Saudi women has reflected their status and image in terms of social and cultural backgrounds. Altorki (1986) and AlMunajjed (1997) conducted research on Saudi women, representing the social, gender, and cultural aspects. Studies of identity construction on social media platforms for Saudi women have found a particular style of identity construction that shows Saudi women's participation. For example, scholars have explored how women use their first name, nicknames, or a pseudonym, or have multiple accounts on one platform with different names (Alsaggaf, 2019; Guta & Karolak, 2015). However, all the research on social platforms has neglected to focus on professional platforms. This research requires observing the real details about the construction of professional identity for Saudi women and online personal branding on LinkedIn.

Conceptually, there are three kinds of identity (Snow, 2001). These include personal, social, and collective identity. Personal identity refers to "the attributes and meanings attributed to oneself by the actor; they are self-designations and self-attributions regarded as personally distinctive" (Snow, 2001, p. 2). Social identity refers to "identities attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space" (Snow, 2001, p. 3). This type of identity establishes the social roles, such as mother or manager, or social categories, such as gender or national categories, as they are seen in the 'Ideal Islamic Saudi woman' (Doumato, 1992); these

are usually called ‘role identities’ (Stryker, 1980). Social identities are essential to social interactions as they offer a direction to ‘change’ or ‘other’ as a social object, whereas personal identities are asserted during the interaction course and derive from the social category but are not necessarily similar, as the salience of category membership in relation to personal identity can be inconsistent. However, in the definition of collective identity there is no consensus, but according to Snow (2001):

> ..its essence resides in a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness” anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity and in relation or contrast to one or more actual or imagined sets of “others” (p.3).

Collective identity, at its essence, is a ‘process’ instead of the ‘property’ of social actors. Social identity can comprise categories such as gender, race, professional roles, social membership, and so on (Ashforth, 2000).

In addition, the idea of personal brand of the branded self was established in the late 1990s, when personal branding was developed using self-improvement books, websites, and self-development courses that offer individuals ideas and strategies to brand themselves (Andrusia & Haskins, 2000; Graham, 2002; McNally & Speak, 2002; Peters, 1997; Spillane, 2000). Practitioners assert that anyone can create a successful personal brand to compete in the marketplace (Khedher, 2014). Academics were more willing to study personal branding after the popularity of social media sites (Gorbatov, Khapova, & Lysova, 2018). Both experimental and interpretive research methods are applied to identify the ways people brand themselves online (Bandinelli & Arvidsson, 2013; Brooks & Anumudu, 2016; Chen, 2013; Dogruer, Menevi, & Eyyam, 2011; Hines, 2004; Khedher, 2014; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Nolan, 2015). Studies discuss personal branding in the ways that show the importance of personal branding studies, using blogs, personal web sites, social media platforms, and

YouTube. This research is relevant to the cultural aspects of online personal branding for different cultures as a form of identity work (Hearn, 2011; Vallas & Cummins, 2015). In studying personal branding culturally, this research moves beyond the scope of existing studies of online personal branding, which focus mainly on the phenomenon itself (Chen, 2013; Gorbatov et al., 2018; Labrecque et al., 2011), towards exploring identity construction as the first step in forming an online personal brand.

It is important to explain the cultural and social aspects of Saudi Arabia, to identify the elements that impact on Saudi women's professional identity construction during online personal branding to produce its own distinctive online culture through production of the branded personas (Hearn, 2008). Saudi women in respect to cultural background have many features that either facilitate or impede professional identity construction and their usage of the professional social media platform LinkedIn to brand themselves. Since Saudi women come from a collectivist, conservative and masculine culture, their background influences the process of identity construction and could result in social media practices such as eschewing photos and other identifying information by using nicknames and using only a first name without the family name (Aljuwaiser, 2018; Guta & Karolak, 2015). In addition, one of the most common sociocultural concerns that Saudi women have is privacy (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Alsharkh, 2012; Binsahl & Chang, 2012; Guta & Karolak, 2015). For example, in Al-Saggaf (2011) study of Saudi women on Facebook, the participants reported liking Facebook for its privacy features, while Binsahl and Chang (2012) found that Saudi women apply privacy settings on social media to control who can view their profiles. The following section presents the research context of Saudi Arabian culture and society to express its impact on professional identity construction for Saudi women.

From ‘A Society of Men’ to ‘Women is an Ambitious Nation’

The research context begins with an explanation of Saudi culture and society as collective, conservative, and masculine. Next, it moves to a discussion of Saudi women on status in society regarding the definition of the ideal Islamic woman and women’s empowerment (*Tamkeen Almara’ah*). Finally, it discusses the recent reforms made in relation to the status of Saudi women as an example of the major changes happening in the Kingdom.

Saudi Arabian culture and society

In Saudi Arabia, Islam plays a significant role in defining culture. It determines societal values, norms, obligations, attitudes, and practices (Al-Saggaf & Begg, 2004; Al-Saggaf & Williamson, 2004; Hoza, 2019; Szilagyi, 2015). Islam is not just a religious ideology but also a system that embraces comprehensive prescriptions to live a full life (Al-Saggaf & Begg, 2004). It acts as the primary force in defining institutional norms, patterns, and social structures, resulting in an entire inclusive social system. AlMunajjed (1997) explained:

> The basic immovable tenet of Islam is belief in the oneness of God and the prophecy of Muhammad. Along with it comes belief in all the preceding prophets, belief in angels and the day of judgement, praying five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan, paying an annual contribution ‘zakat’ for the poor and going on pilgrimage to Meccah at least once in a lifetime (the Five Pillars of Islam). Other matters relating to daily life and worldly affairs are left to the interpretation of scholars who are well versed in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Therefore, laws may vary with the passing of time only when these do not contradict the pillars of Islam (p. 10).

There is an interrelation between Islam as a religion and traditions in Saudi Arabian society. As a result of this combination, society became conservative. Saudi culture and society reflect a unique combination of traditional and modern characteristics that distinguish it from

other Arab nations. The conservative attributes appear in legal and social practices. The adoption of changes and the transition to new practices is very slow because of the high resistance of modernity created by the conservative nature of the society. This characteristic of conservative societies results in distinct life systems and obligations, such as gender segregation, and some practical aspects that reflect male domination in Saudi Arabian society. Therefore, with this conservatism, Saudi culture is seen as patriarchal (Moghadam, 2004; Pharaon, 2004).

The overall image of Saudi Arabian society reflects a masculine character in relation to gender, politics, and religion. Hofstede, a social psychologist, supported this conclusion through his famous studies on cultural dimensions—masculinity/femininity being one of them. A masculine character indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement, and success, with success being defined by the winner/best in the field—a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organisational life (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Hofstede found that Saudi Arabia has a high masculinity score, making it a masculine society. In addition, the interconnection between religion, politics, and gender explains how this masculine society creates the strict rules that affect Saudi women in everyday lives (Quamar, 2016). One of the most widely known rules highlighted by Western media regarding women in Saudi Arabia is that women cannot drive a car. However, the situation is deeper than that. Women are controlled by men in many aspects of their lives, such as mobility, education, employment, and health, making them subordinate to men at all levels: legal, social, political, and economic (Quamar, 2016). This situation is often justified by claiming it stabilises the family unit. Women are expected to find fulfilment through accepting and carrying out their obligations toward their family (Mtango, 2004). Thus, masculine societies, such as Saudi Arabia, traditionally put women in specific situations managed by their male custodians, incorporating this concept into the ideology of Saudi women (Doumato, 1992).

The usage of the 'Wahhabism', a religious reform movement in Islam, in an interpretation of the Qur'an that promotes the authority of men is a pressing issue. The interpretation of some texts of the Qur'an is done literally by some conservative religious scholars, or (*ulama,* علاّمه), to silence the voices of women under the name of Islam (AlMunajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986). However, it is an Islamic tradition, not religion. The Islamic tradition is the main factor that affects traditional position, obligations, and privileges of Saudi women (AlMunajjed, 1997). Although Islam as a religion offers women equal rights with men, the interpretations of Qur'an by the *ulama*, the interpreters of Islamic doctrine and law, have shaped the roles and realities of women in conservative societies (AlMunajjed, 1997). This compromise can be seen in everyday life for Saudi women. It appears through gender segregation, veiling, education, employment, freedom of movement, and restrictions under family law. Gender segregation, veiling, and guardianship are the three main rules that distinguish Saudi culture and society and have been affecting the recognition and ways of life for Saudi women.

Gender segregation

In Saudi Arabia, women are separated from men to whom they are not related, and the two genders do not mix. This gender segregation is a common rule that relates to every aspect of social and public life. For example, it applies in education, hospitals, banking, workplaces, parties, weddings, business, and restaurants. Usually, people are completely separated, or areas are offered just for women, such as waiting rooms in hospitals and family dining rooms in restaurants. As Lipsky (1959, p.298) stated, "there is a strong sense in Arabian society of what is public and what is private. Women (in Saudi Arabia) belong to the private world". Public space is considered mostly as male space, while private space is associated with women, as they belong to their relatives and others with whom they have close relationships. Women

belong to a private area that might be seen as a type of sanctuary to protect them. It is expected that all men protect this sanctuary as their duty. Sanctuary, as it was defined, is one of the norms in Saudi Arabian society. Sanctuary is related to honour and is an attribute of men and shame related to women (Deaver, 1980). Any unusual behaviour by women, such as mixing with unrelated men or being in public without a male relative, or (*mahram*, محرم), challenges the ideal Islamic society and creates shame. Stiehm (1976) clearly explains the meaning of honour from the Islamic and cultural point of view, which reflects the exact meaning in Saudi Arabian society:

> Honor is a crucial ingredient of every society. In Islamic cultures (and in many pre-Islamic Mediterranean cultures) male honor is closely linked to female purity: this requires virginity for the unmarried, fidelity for the married, and continence for the divorced or widowed. This conception of honor means that the behaviour of an individual woman affects not only her own reputation but also that of her husband, her father, her brother, indeed that of all her male kin. (p. 277).

Gender segregation and limiting women to their own relatives and family is a routine mechanism invented to regulate women. Placing restrictions on mobility of women reflects the specific importance of 'family honour' that is given by society, as behaviours of women are connected to the honour of their father, husband, and brothers (AlMunajjed, 1997; Le Renard, 2014). Besides, family relationships have priority in Arabic Islamic nations, and mainly in Saudi Arabian culture. Practicing Islam involves regular contact and visits with blood relatives, providing support whenever the family or family member wants it. These Saudi Arabian characteristics are driven by Islam, leading to aspects of Saudi Arabian society, such as the relationship between people of different genders. Therefore, communication between men and women in society is limited as no friendship or relationship can occur (Altorki, 1986).

Interaction between men and women is very formal, and there is always uncertainty and fear of misunderstanding behaviour. Typically, this is a result of segregating the whole societal structure (AlMunajjed, 1997). However, segregation has undergone dramatic change in recent years as social attitudes have changed due to economic, political, and sociocultural improvements in the Saudi public sphere over the course of generations. The segregation of society has yielded a special domain of 'only for women' that reflects the uniqueness and abilities of Saudi women (Le Renard, 2008, 2014). Women have their own businesses, schools, activities, and even shopping centres. This societal structure benefits Saudi women by allowing them to experience feminine atmospheres with sufficient qualifications and high skill levels. For example, in Saudi Arabia, there are shopping centres, hairdressers and entertainment centres for women, where men are not allowed (Le Renard, 2008). Gender segregation has become a safeguard against too many complications emerging in the presence of men, rather than being only a way of life.

Veiling

According to AlMunajjed (1997, p.47) veil is "the symbol of seclusion of women". When Saudi women leave their house, they wear traditional clothes called *abaya* (a long dress that covers the whole body) and a *hijab* to cover their heads and a veil to cover their faces; some call the veil a *niqab*. Women must wear these garments in Saudi Arabia to indicate their modesty and to maintain purity. However, whether one wears a veil in Saudi Arabia is also a dilemma. It is a critical subject: most women consider the moral, religious, and cultural connotation of veils, while others argue that veils are only worn because of Islam. Others believe that it is a matter of tradition and values (AlMunajjed, 1997). Due to these differences, recently, there have been three kinds of veiling practices: (1) women who wear *abaya* and veil (cover their faces), (2) those who wear *abaya* with a *hijab* (cover their heads), and (3) those

wearing *abaya* without a *hijab* or *niqab*. Veiling is considered a dress code for women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The controversial action in society is the way of wearing the *abaya*. The youngest generation has mostly debated the way of wearing it, whether with a *hijab* (head cover) or veil, or without either the *hijab* or veil, the latter of which is the most popular new trend. Such debate reflects the diversity of Saudi women and the fact that veiling practices are one of the common features that support this variation and diversity (Le Renard, 2014; Quamar, 2016).

In relation to men and women, the veil plays a vital role in traditional society in Saudi Arabia. When Saudi women wear the veil, they deliver a variety of messages about themselves and about society. Some of them wear it as a "symbol of a nationalist trend, a coded message that reflects an ideological choice" (AlMunajjed, 1997, p. 56); this is seen as an Islamisation element that distinguishes Muslim women from non-Muslim women. It is also viewed as fulfilment for significant Saudi identity; when you look for the traditional Saudi women, you will see them with abaya and *hijab*, or veil. Saudi women also use the veil as a protective shield, hiding them from the eyes of unrelated men. As Altorki (1986) claims, veiling is functional for "the maintenance of patrilateral cousin marriage patterns" (p. 36). Women wear veils to avoid drawing attention to themselves, therefore, conserving their anonymity. They often link the veil to aspects of chastity, purity, and decency. It works as a protection, a security measure, and a defence mechanism for the maintenance of family honour. Thus, it has become a social distance symbol and protection for Saudi females from unrelated men. Saudi women who work in a mixed-gender environment, such as medical doctors and nurses, consider the veil as a symbol of social distance, and a tool to set boundaries and protection. As AlMunajjed (1997) explained it:

> The veil is therefore considered an external protective device in preserving premarital and marital chastity, a means of preventing 'fitnah' (from the verb 'fatana', meaning to seduce, to lead into temptation). Fitnah refers to the fascination and sexual attraction felt by a man at the sight of a pretty woman. He may become distracted or demented (maftoun) and may even lose his self-control (p. 54).

However, talking about the choices of veiling practices there are women who wear the veil not because they want to, but because of their family or societal traditions. Such women do not want to be different from other women in society. They consider themselves open-minded, but they practice their openness outside of their society. The male authority also plays an important role in the ways that women practice veiling. If the guardian is open-minded, women will have the ability to choose how to wear the veil; if not, they will be forced to follow their guardian's preferences. However, in recent years, with the improvement of socioeconomic conditions for Saudi women, the number of women who can choose the way they practice veiling in public has increased (Quamar, 2016). Although the development is slow, it empowers women in society and has impacted social norms regarding veiling.

Guardianship

Moghadam (2004) identified patriarchy as when "the senior man has authority over everyone else in the family, including younger men, and women are subject to distinct forms of control and subordination" (p. 141). The nature of Saudi cultural patriarchy forms the system of male guardianship that indicates the responsibility of the male guardian in making critical judgments in the life of women. In Saudi Arabia, every woman is expected to have a male guardian, despite age, social status, or economic condition. The guardian usually is an immediate male family member, for example, a father, brother, husband, son, or even uncle. Several studies found that the mobility and professional expansion of women are impeded by

the male guardianship (Aldossary, While, & Barriball, 2008; Almunajjed, 2010; Thompson, 2015; Metcalfe, 2011; Oshan & S, 2007). This contains the ability to choose a job, university, or major area of study. Saudi women must gain permission from their guardians in every decision they want to make, even in terms of mobility. For example, if they want to visit their families, they need to gain permission from their husbands before visiting.

The guardianship is problematic, not in its nature but in its practices, by exacerbating the domination by men. As Quamar (2016) explains, guardianship is a symptom of wider structural problems that Saudi women face that reflect the masculine attributes of society. However, the guardianship system is considered a core symptom that activates men's authority over women in everyday life. Islamic heritage puts Saudi women in a secondary status in society and sees them as vulnerable and in need of protection—which is to be provided by a male guardian. The guardianship puts women in situations where their choices in life do not just depend on themselves as a person but also on a male guardian. Their choices, such as attending college or university, finding a job, traveling abroad, and undergoing surgery in hospital, are all issues that require written permission from a male guardian (Altorki, 1986).

Akin to veiling, the practice of guardianship depends on the guardians themselves and their mindset. On the one hand, some guardians support women and understand their needs and rights. These guardians usually offer women permission and give them the full right to make their own decisions and preferences. On the other hand, there are guardians who use their authority to control the lives of women (Quamar, 2016). For example, they control their mobility, their education choices, and their travel decisions. The guardianship system remains a structural constraint in Saudi Arabian society. Women living with this system always carry in the back of their minds the opinions of their guardians and how it impacts all aspects of their lives. Therefore, this reflects intense constraints on daily routines of Saudi women. The legal

terms of guardianship have led to situations that violate women's human rights, especially in the case of mothers who are placed under their minor son's guardianship or divorced women who must obtain permission from their children's father to make decisions about their children's mobility. The impact of this gendered system of guardianship can be seen in daily socialisation processes and in women's inferior position in the social hierarchy. This situation rationalizes the stereotype of male superiority and preference over women in society.

Gender segregation, veiling practices, and guardianship have impacted the status of Saudi women in society. A woman can be criticised depending on her practice of one or all of social rules, i.e., social norms and values. It is considered an essential duty for a woman to protect the name of her guardian, reputation, and honour. A woman must consider those rules and any violation of them brings shame, or ('*ayb*, عيب), (Altorki, 1986). In their everyday lives, women avoid '*ayb* by adopting norms and values of society, even when they do not want to (Altorki, 1986). However, Saudi women have ways of constructing their reality as to ensure peace and satisfaction without fighting with families and society (Deaver, 1980; Le Renard, 2014). Gender segregation and veiling have become the main part of social norms and values that reflect the identity of Saudi Arabia as a country. Saudi women need to consider these rules in every aspect of their lives; even if they have a preference, these rules come first, as they shape the image of the Ideal Islamic Saudi woman.

The ideal Islamic woman

The image of Saudi women related to the 'ideal Islamic woman' has become an important social expectation. As defined by *ulama* since the 1950s, this ideology expresses the official statement of the Saudi government within the national culture. Since public education was established for women, the roles for women have become a contentious point of focus, and the concept of an ideal Islamic woman remains to preserve their roles in society. Further,

it is essential to define an Ideal Islamic woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She is a wife and mother who finds her place within the basic unit of society—family—and her man always protects her. She remains at home, being the educator of children and the traditional values reproducer. As the mother of future generations, she is dedicated to protecting the family and guarding the Islamic idea of morality and traditional values. These attributes outline what makes the ideal Islamic woman a symbol that stands alongside other symbols to define the national identity of Saudi Arabia. The view of the ideal woman tends to boost the public segregation of genders as the authentic mark of an Islamic society. It defines the specific Saudi Arabian Muslim society as something morally distinct from other Muslim countries and explains why Saudi women are considered a symbol of the national identity for their country (Doumato, 1992; Le Renard, 2014).

In Saudi Arabia, the common belief about the roles of women is fundamental in maintaining the family structure. This role extends to society and puts pressure on them. Saudi women have the responsibility of upholding their families in every aspect of their lives and behaviour. These women have had a long history of male domination and have seen dramatic changes in their sociocultural roles (Altorki, 1986; Deaver, 1980). The two central roles that Saudi women have played in society are housewife and mother. In the past, females went to school just to become good wives and mothers and no more (Doumato, 1992). However, recently, Saudi women have participated in significant activities, just like men, and hold high positions in the country (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019).

The turning point of women's changing role in Saudi Arabian society over many generations came after the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s. This changing role sparked a debate over offering females the chance to receive an education (Doumato, 1992). In 1979, American women came to Saudi Arabia to establish Aramco, the Arabic-American

oil company (Alsaggaf, 2015). Geopolitical incidents, such as the First Gulf War—when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990—and the Second Gulf War—when a United States-led coalition attacked Iraq—increased the presence of foreigners in Saudi Arabia, which affected the status of Saudi women (Alsaggaf, 2015). Exposure to the free lifestyle that Western women practiced in Saudi Arabia, which included driving cars and going out in public without covering their faces, encouraged some Saudi women to begin to fight for their rights (Doumato, 1992).

One well-known example occurred on 6 November 1990, the date of a women's driving demonstration. On this date, 49 women from well-known families asked for their right to drive and were punished by their husbands following a *fatwa* that stated there would be no allowing women to drive cars because women need to be protected by men (Doumato, 1992). This demonstration revealed the hidden tensions in Saudi Arabia between those with liberal attitudes who wanted Islamic evolution and those who wanted to retain the literal interpretation of Islam that is a part of the country's Wahhabi heritage (Doumato, 1992). Thus, the demonstration was a chance to refresh the image of the ideal Islamic woman as an isolated wife and mother (Doumato, 1992). This image was encouraged by focusing on reaffirming traditional attitudes about the roles of women in society (Doumato, 1992).

Saudi women's status in society

Until recent years, the status of Saudi women has been a controversial issue among conservative and liberal Saudi people in relation to women's rights and responsibilities (Hamdan, 2005) as well as their role in society relative to men. However, taking an Islamic perspective, women's status has been elevated on many occasions (AlMunajjed, 1997). As a result of the conservative society, the rules and laws view Saudi women as pious, modest, and devoted to their families (Le Renard, 2008), and this is part of the image of the ideal Muslim woman as discussed in the previous sections. However, the new generation is aware of their

capabilities, and they are questioning their social norms and values (Le Renard, 2014; Yamani, 2005). Table 1.1 illustrates the timeline that is a mix of dramatic and sharp changes in Saudi women's status in society from the establishment of public education for girls to the changes in women status toward women's empowerment (*Tamkeen Almara'ah*) ending with the most recent decision made to nominate Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia, as the capital of Arab women for 2020 under the slogan, 'Women is an ambitious nation' (Saudi Press Agency, 2020)

1950s -1971	2008 – 2015	2015-2019	2019-2020 & On
Public education for girls became a contention focus on society. In 1959, education for girls was officially established. The allowance for Saudi girls to attend higher education inside the country. The establishment of the first college for girls in Saudi Arabia.	The foundation stone was laid for Princess Norah Bint Abdul Rahman AL Saud University, which is the first integrated government university town for women in Saudi Arabia. A royal order was issued to appoint 30 women members to the AL Shoura Council, and the decision included that the representation of women would not be less than 20% of the members of the council. The first women were appointed to the position of Deputy Minister of Education for Girls. Opening the way for women to work in judicial facilities, the Ministry of Justice decided to grant attorney's licenses to women until the number of Saudi female lawyers reached 280 in 2018. A royal decree was prepared to compel Saudi women to obtain a national identity card according to a gradual phased plan within a period not exceeding seven years, after which the national identity card is the only way to prove one's identity. Laws were issued granting women the right to access health care; previously this right was attached to the guardian.	Allowed women to participate in Saudi municipal elections. In 2017, the King of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, granted women the right to drive, and the decision included directing the Traffic Departments to start issuing driver's licences to women, beginning 24 June 2018. Lifted the ban on women entering sports fields and allowed them to attend sporting events as of the beginning of 2018. The physical education program was included in the educational curricula of girls' schools. Approved the Ministry of the Interior's preparation of a draft system to combat harassment and continuing to support the rights of women, the family, and children. The percentage of women in the workforce jumped to 23%; previously it had been 14% over the past 28 years.	Took measures to limit the guardian's authority, which would allow male relatives to have guardianship of a woman in a number of her personal situations, such as travel, marriage, and sale. Women were given the right to apply for a family registry from the Civil Status Department. The new amendments did not differentiate between a man and a woman in responsibility for minor children and made the woman a 'head of a family' equal to the husband if there were minor children. The condition of the guardian's consent that was in effect when the woman extracted her passport was revoked. Freedom of travel was granted to females over 21 years of age without restriction or guardian's approval. The condition of a mahram for a woman, if she lived in tourist accommodation facilities, was removed. The Ministry of Labour eliminated wage differences between men and women and established working hours for women. Equality between men and women of retirement age and employment and in the definition of work and the definition of the worker was established. Launched programs to accommodate working women's children to increase women's participation in the labour market. The Ministry of Justice announced the opening of the door for Saudi women to be employed as a notary public after allowing employment for them as legal consultants and researchers in the Ministry for the first time. The Saudi Ministry of Defence announced the opening of the application for women's military positions (at the rank of first soldier, corporal, sergeant agent, sergeant) in the branches of the ministry from the Royal Saudi Land Forces, the Saudi Royal Air Force, the Saudi Royal Naval Forces, and the Royal Saudi Air Defence Forces, strategic missiles, and medical services for the armed forces. The entry of Saudi women to these sectors is a historic event, as it happened for the first time. Riyadh, the capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, became the capital of Arab women for 2020 under the slogan **'Women is an ambitious nation'.** 53 Saudi women were appointed in the Public Prosecution for the first time.

Table 1.1 Tracking the status of Saudi women, 1950s-2020

Saudi culture is not homogeneous, and the expectations of women's own performance and behaviours vary depending on the lives of women, the religious beliefs of the woman or her family, and family traditions. Therefore, their practice in society, such as veiling, gender segregation, and guardianship, as well as their consideration of what is private and what is public, may be viewed differently for individuals and families in different regions and cities in Saudi Arabia (Alsaggaf, 2015). This can be observed in the differences in women's attitudes in their professional participation in work or employment.

Introducing the women's empowerment in Middle Eastern context, Tamkeen Almara'ah.

Saudi women experience marginalisation (*Tahmeesh*), which appears when individuals are subjected to a state of social, economic, and political exclusion that leads to physical and moral deprivation, the denial of human rights and a lack of individual opportunities and choices (Almizr, 2017). Saudi women lost many rights because they lived in a society with conservative customs and traditions (Almizr, 2017). They were under the umbrella of patriarchal authority, actualised in domination by men and sociocultural norms that denied women their rights (Pharaon, 2004). There has always been discrimination against women in Saudi Arabian society, and authority has always been given to men (Almizr, 2017; Pharaon, 2004). Women were seen as housewives and mothers, born, and lived solely for these purposes. They were only permitted to do certain types of work, such as sewing and herding sheep (Almizr, 2017). Therefore, the experience of Saudi women as regard to *Tahmeesh* means they are positioned outside the circle of decision-making in education and employment (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Almizr, 2017; Ramady, 2010). However, things are changing, and the status of Saudi women has greatly improved from 1960 to the present day.

In 1960, the full meaning of *Tamkeen* became clear when Saudi Arabia, in its fundamental law, settled the primary positions of men and women in the social and economic spheres by strengthening the economic, social, and family roles that concern women, following the provisions of Islam (Alawad, 2014; Almizr, 2017; Shalhoub, 2015). The Saudi government supported women at that time by acknowledging their right to education and employment (Almizr, 2017). *Tamkeen Almara'ah* can be roughly translated to the English concept of women's empowerment (Hoza, 2019; Shalhoub, 2015; van Geel, 2016). Even though most empirical studies of Saudi women have used the concept of women's empowerment, that concept is not compatible with the true meaning of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* in the Saudi context (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Alawad, 2014; Almizr, 2017; Altorki, 1977; Hoza, 2019; Ramady, 2010; Shalhoub, 2015; Shaya & Abu Khait, 2017; van Geel, 2016). When talking about women's empowerment in the Middle East (van Geel, 2016), *Tamkeen Almara'ah* is the starting point that enables women before empowering them.

New women's roles in the new Saudi Arabia

The 'new Saudi Arabia' refers to a new version of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that has started under the rule of King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz bin Saud and his son, Prince Mohamed bin Salman bin Abdul Aziz (Hvidt, 2018). It is a new era that introduced the strategic framework of Saudi Vision 2030 to improve the Kingdom by reducing the dependence on oil, varying its economy, and developing public sectors, such as health, education, recreation, and tourism. The announcement about the 2030 Saudi Vision was made in 2016 by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman who is known as 'a man of action' (Hvidt, 2018). For political and economic reasons, Vision 2030 relaxed the religious hold on society and enhanced the role of women in public by bringing women into the job market and changing their status. Therefore, several changes happened in the status of Saudi women, see Table 1.1, such as an increase in

job opportunities and opening of doors to new positions, allowing women to drive a car, and relaxing the control of dress codes for women. In this regard, Prince Mohammed bin Salman said, “a woman should decide what type of clothing she should wear as long as it is decent and respectful” (Hvidt, 2018, p. 5). Thus, this opening gave women the opportunity to choose what they want to wear in public and allowed them to be empowered, (become *Nessa’ Mumaknat*). As to reclaiming women, Saudi women gain empowerment through returning to an Islamic perspective and claiming their rights from authentic Islamic regulations:

> The Saudi historian and writer Dalal Mukhlid al-Harbi highlights the contribution of Muslim women throughout Islamic history, aiming to give “women who are ignored their rightful place in history”. Some men, too, use this strategy. Dr Fahad al-Humudi, Assistant Professor at Imam Muhammad bin Sa‘ud Islamic University in Riyadh, shows in his article “Mashura al-nisa fil sunna” (The Consultation of Women in the Prophetic Tradition) that the Qur’an encourages people to consult women on culture, family, war and public issues, and that this was the practice of Muhammad and his companions. (van Geel, 2012, p. 75).

My identity as a Saudi woman researcher

Researching Saudi women was not the option when I decided to undertake higher education. Before I came to Australia, I always wondered why people from my country who study abroad always do their studies in a Saudi Arabian or Arabic context? After my Master of Research degree, the answer was obvious: through your background, knowledge, and interests, you position yourself as a researcher and build your personal brand for your research career. I researched women from my country to show the real version of contemporary Saudi women. I am a Saudi woman who considers the culture, social and gendered aspects of Saudi culture in

my everyday life in both social and professional situations. My hometown is in the Qassim region. This region is considered the most conservative area in Saudi Arabia. My family is a mix of very conservative and open-minded members, which allowed me to balance my position and thoughts.

I grew up in a family that considers education one of the most important factors in life. This may be because my father could not complete his education as he was taking care of his family so he had his own business, whereas my mother was one of the many women who could not complete her education because her uncle decided that six years of school was enough for the girls in the family, who – in his view – did not need to learn anything more than reading and writing to teach their children. He felt housework was more important than education. Interestingly, however, my mother completed her education after we grew up. I was in university doing my bachelor's degree and she was in high school giving me a life lesson of 'never giving up' by completing her studies. When she earned a bachelor's degree, I was doing my first master's degree in Australia. After that, she took a job as the head of the women's department at the Ministry of Development and Social Work Centre; she retired in 2020. I always say that my sister, who is a paediatric rheumatology consultant, and I are an extension of an ambitious mother and father.

I grew up with the idea that I had to be successful and different in a way that would ensure my quality of life and support my society. I finished my bachelor's degree and took my current job at Qassim University; at that time, I became engaged to my colleague who is working with me in the Marketing and Management Department in Qassim university in Saudi Arabia. Before we met, he did not know me as a person; I was just a name, as the female section is separated from the male section, and we had not met before. However, he had a friend whose mother is a friend of my mother, so he suggested choosing me as a lifelong companion. One of

the main things that supports our marriage is that we work at the same place, have the same speciality and the same goal of completing additional higher education and returning to our jobs at Qassim University. Since the university required that we complete our higher education in another country, Khaled, my husband, raised the possibility of our studying abroad, because at the time it was not possible for me to go overseas alone. When I got my job, and before I knew Khaled, I relied on the importance of education to my father, so I was thinking of trying to convince him to let me go overseas with one of my brothers. I have been studying since that time and I am now finalising my PhD in Sydney, Australia. I am alone with my children because my husband finished his PhD six months ago and went back to Saudi Arabia after his scholarship finished.

I am one of many Saudi women who think of development and change. It is vital for me to bring good feelings to anybody and show who today's Saudi women are. I always try to be aware of my life, choices, and overall view of the quality of my life while meeting my family's expectations. I love marketing and believe it is important not just for products and business but also for people. This is one of the main reasons that made me interested in studying personal branding in a research context, as I believe personal brands can be helpful for us as Saudi women. As part of my interest in marketing, I always think of the impression that I make in others' minds when they meet me. In the field of Marketing we say, the first impression is lasting, so it is helpful to make a positive impression. My personal logo represents my name and my main characteristics, see Figure 1.1. I use it online in social media platforms and in any situation where a photo is required; it is an alternative to a personal photo, as I cannot use my photo in public.

Figure 1.1: My personal logo

Like many Saudi women, I have volunteered to be recognised in society. Since 2007, I have been a volunteer at the Unizah Women's Charity Association (*Qatrah*, قطرة). I served on the Board of Directors from 2012 to 2018. At that time, I was the youngest co-founder of this charity association. I undertook several marketing consultations for small businesses and have carried out several training programs in small business, entrepreneurship, marketing and personal branding in Saudi Arabia. I love my job and enjoy teaching university students; I consider my job to be central to my life's purpose of helping girls see a suitable pathway in their lives. Talking about research as I began with, after the long, interesting and amazing journey of doing research on women from my country, I believe that we are all one, although we have different experiences. The collectivist nature of Saudi culture created our kind of women; we are a national brand representing a distinguished type of change-makers, the type of women who consider their collective identity to be a mix of family culture, societal expectations and norms and considerations of gender. As change-makers, we use the strength of our personalities to solve our weaknesses, support and complete each other, and learn from each other. Being a researcher on Saudi or even Arab women more generally is an honour. I pray to God to help me in my endeavour to carry out this research in the best helpful way.

Research problem

For Saudi women, constructing a professional identity is not as straightforward as for other women due to their status in Saudi Arabian society and their consideration of cultural and social aspects. Living in a society that considers women to be private objects rather than public people puts professional women in a confusing situation when they want to construct their identity, especially when building online personal brands on LinkedIn. Since personal branding is viewed as a Western phenomenon associated with individualistic culture (Kanai, 2015), branding practices are more problematic and complicated when the phenomenon is studied among women in a conservative society and collectivistic culture. Personal branding is affected by many types of tensions, including cultural, gendered, and social tensions that shape the branding elements and behaviour. This thesis considers personal branding as a form of identity work that explores identity negotiation and management by analysing Saudi women's professional identity construction identity through narrative and identity performance.

This thesis explores the complexity of identity work in a sociocultural and gendered context and Saudi women's perspectives on and how deal with their background, status, and preferences. This thesis reveals the 'Me' of a professional woman combined with the 'We' of a collective identity in consideration of women's traditional status in society, family culture, the sociocultural rules of gender segregation and veiling and the impact of the notion of the ideal Islamic woman in the Saudi context. In this research, professional women present their experiences of identity construction through online personal branding and in real life through narratives and performances to gain social recognition. This interpretive research paradigm is suitable for studying the experience of professional identity construction for Saudi women. The interpretivist paradigm asserts that there is no single reality, but multiple realities, as is shown through the women's different experiences and interpretations. In terms of this research, Saudi

women – due to their background, their status as women, their experiences, and their professional needs – participate multiple ways of knowing.

Thus, the research questions are explored through the interpretivist research paradigm using a qualitative research methodology. Thirty-nine professional women from different regions of Saudi Arabia were interviewed through research interviews. This thesis explores the experiences of professional women in relation to their identity construction.

Research questions

This thesis aims to explore how Saudi women construct their identities using online personal branding on LinkedIn. It opens the door to identify the online tensions and factors that steer Saudi women's identity work.

The research questions and sub-questions are:

- How do Saudi professional women construct professional identity through online personal branding on LinkedIn?
    - What are the tensions and factors that influence their identity construction?
    - How do these factors influence Saudi women's identity work online?
- What is the impact of collective identity (cultural, social, and gender background) on Saudi women's professional identity and online identity work through personal branding?

Using a grounded theory approach in analysing the research data allowed for an in-depth interpretation that led to three levels of research findings. The surface level explored identity work in doing online personal branding and revealed the identity work tensions that

are inherent in LinkedIn features and sociocultural tensions and the women's ways to deal with these tensions, along with the three main factors that steer the identity work of Saudi women on LinkedIn. The three factors are sociocultural rules around gender segregation and veiling, guardianship, and ideal femininity, which relates to the status of women in society and the notion of the ideal Islamic woman. The findings then guided exploration of the experience of professional identity construction by pinpointing the reason for building a personal brand and having a professional identity, which revealed the need for these women to move from being marginalised (*Nessa' Muhamashat*) to becoming empowered (*Nessa' mumaknat*) in a professional context. All the interpretation and analysis of Saudi women's experiences and their narratives and performance of identity construction helped clarify their attitudes to and considerations of building an online personal brand and having a professional identity, which is the third level of interpretation: this level shows who Saudi women are relative to their gendered and collective identity. It also demonstrated how Saudi women deal with their cultural, social, and gendered background in a way that ensures that they garner benefits while meeting society's expectations.

The thesis explores the ways in which Saudi professional women construct a professional identity by analysing their online personal branding work. Here, the study is influenced by Slay and Smith's (2011) "professional identity redefinition process" and Ibarra's (1999) of "the adaptation process" to build a conceptual framework that related to identity work.

This research makes three main contributions to research on Saudi women in a professional context. First, it offers an in-depth interpretation of the professional identity construction and online identity work that Saudi women undertake from the lived experience of a Saudi woman, giving the findings a depth of understanding that might be overlooked,

intentionally or otherwise, by others. The impact of sociocultural rules, guardianship, and ideal femininity combined with the tensions involved in identity work and online personal branding are analysed for the first time in this study. Second, it contributes to the concept of women's empowerment in a Saudi context under the concept of *Tamkeen Almara'ah*. This thesis could serve as a starting point to consider *Tamkeen Almara'ah* as a suitable term for studying women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia, as the definition of the term it offers comes from the experience of Saudi women themselves. Finally, this research contributes to gender studies in a Saudi professional context, as it suggests that today's Saudi women are revising the notion of ideal femininity to take account of women's status, both traditional and modern.

Thesis organisation

The thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 2 contains a literature review that identifies the research gap and presents previous research in three parts. The first is identity construction work and personal branding as a form of identity work. The second examines studies done on Saudi women, the impact of their cultural, social, and gendered background, and the impact of ideal Islamic women on the lives of Saudi women. The third review is the studies of women on social media.

Chapter 3 explains the research methodology by outlining the research design and philosophy and lays out the research methods, sample and data collection and analysis. It ends with a reflection on the research journey, explaining my role as a researcher and my position as an insider, along with my experience of studying Saudi professional women and the challenges during this study.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the analysis chapters. Chapter 4 discusses sociocultural identity work during online personal branding in two sections. First, it explored two kinds of tensions

facing Saudi women's identity work while practicing online personal branding: LinkedIn feature tensions and sociocultural norm tensions. Second, it analysed Saudi women's experience of constructing a professional identity through interpreting their sociocultural identity work on LinkedIn and by analysing the three key factors that shape their online identity work: sociocultural rules, guardianship, and ideal femininity. The deep interpretation of chapter 4 sheds light on the real needs of professional identity construction for Saudi women, which is analysed in chapter 5.

Chapter 5 analyses the need for women's empowerment in a Middle Eastern context. *Tamkeen Almara'ah* appeared as a reason for professional identity construction and being on LinkedIn. It analyses how the meaning of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* appeared in the narratives of women's identity construction. This chapter suggests a definition of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* from women's experience of professional identity construction. Following the analysis of professional identity construction and the women's experiences and needs for *Tamkeen*, chapter 6 explains how women reshaped the notion of professional femininity.

Chapter 6 interprets ideal femininity in a professional context during online personal branding. Considering Saudi women's collective identity and traditional status of women, the experiences of Saudi women emphasise that they are change-makers in their identity work. Chapter 6 explains who the change-makers are in the context of Saudi women. They have shaped a model of professional femininity with due consideration of the notion of ideal Islamic women and the traditional status of Saudi women, as identified in the online personal branding practices used in their identity work on LinkedIn.

Chapter 7 is the discussion and conclusion chapter. This chapter addresses the conceptual framework of the research and discuss the research findings. It explores the research questions, discusses the research contribution including the theoretical and empirical

achievements. This thesis concludes by explaining the research limitations and suggests possible avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relating to professional identity construction particularly in relation to Saudi women. The chapter starts by reviewing the cultural, social and gendered aspects of identity negotiation for Saudi women in order to express the ways in which they experience identity. It then moves on to the studies of identity and identity construction and personal branding that helped answer the research questions before ending with studies of Saudi women's identity on the social media platform LinkedIn as a research context. The gaps in existing research are identified, and the significance of answering the research question is explained.

The cultural, social, and gendered aspects of identity negotiation for Saudi women

In Saudi women's identity construction, their identity narrative and performance in a professional context could reveal the aspects that facilitate or implement their identity work, whether online or in real-life situations. Considering the identity of Saudi women as a secret identity makes them subject to the set of customs and traditions, whether from culture, society, or family (Altorki, 1986; Altuwayjiri, 2019; Deaver, 1980). This understanding makes Saudi women live within the norms established over time and the framework of the ideal Saudi woman, social customs, and family culture. The gender identity of Saudi women intersects with social class and family identity (Syed, Ali, & Hennekam, 2018). Gender identity for women is related to the gender ideology formed within the culture of Saudi Arabia, which reflects attributes of Islamic society. Doumato (1992) states that the gender ideology is

constructed through ‘ideal Islamic Woman’ to distinguish Saudi women in society. This identity distinguishes Saudi women from other cultures and/or societies by applying gender segregation, veiling, and limiting the communication with men in everyday life, which allows this ideal woman to stand to define Saudi Arabian national identity.

Generally, when a woman becomes professional and relies on herself, she must work to formulate her professional identity. Yet, in the situation of Saudi women, the process of building professional identity is the process of formulating or developing ‘who I am’ in the crowd of ‘we’ with different roles and templates of other identity roles (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019; Szilagyi, 2015). The templates from the crowd of ‘we’ make identity construction complex and requiring management. The different roles that women play in society, whether at home, as a mother, sister, or daughter, or, in the family, being a woman who supports the family and protects its reputation, or in the community as an ideal woman – fulfilling society’s expectations and aspirations contributes to identity confusion (Guta & Karolak, 2015).

Answering the question ‘who am I?’ or ‘what are we?’ requires a response that reflects some dominant definition of identity. Answer might be given, for instance, based on profession or occupation of individual (e.g., a businesswoman or teacher) or organisational position (e.g., middle-level manager), or as one’s national identity (Saudi Muslim women), gender identity (a woman), and social and cultural identity. Understanding the sense of identity links experiences and minimises fragmentation in feelings and thinking. The identity meanings are various, and they are attached to an individual by two main components: self and others (Gecas, 1982). These meanings refer to the social roles and group characters an individual belongs to a social identity and personal identity. The terms ‘self’, ‘role’, ‘positioning’, ‘subject position’, and ‘subjectivity’ refer to different identity aspects. ‘The self’ regards the feelings of an individual; ‘role’ asserts identity aspects that are more static, formal, and ritualistic; and

‘subject position’ or ‘subjectivity’ refer to ‘agency, conscious activity, and authorship’ (Luk, 2008, p. 122).

To be more specific, conceptualising the identity of Saudi women as a secret or private identity for so long has affected the realisation of the importance of women having a distinguished identity. It has resulted in the belief that their identity comes from outside of themselves, from others, and is not something they construct. On the one hand, the visibility and recognition of women in society is impacted by social norms, as women should not be identified or known in public as men are. On the other hand, when a woman has support from a family member or guardian, she can be visible and well-known (Altorki, 1986; Thompson, 2015). This situation will give a woman a unique identity, and society will be proud of this distinguished woman. According to Mustafa and Troudi (2019), Saudi women are conscious of their familial and social duties and roles as well as the gendered roles they must follow and how these duties and roles become a part of their gendered identity. Simultaneously, Saudi women attempt to avoid the image of being restricted by roles and duties and emphasised that “their actions stemmed from an understanding of how compliance and agency are not contradictory” (Mustafa and Troudi, 2019, p. 136). In this way, women create spaces for the agency that are meaningful while responding to religious and social norms and duties. Mustafa (2017) reported a term he called ‘agency maneuvers’ where Saudi women wilfully subjected themselves to their society’s norms and practices, which feminist scholars identify as subjection, while at the same time resisting and strategically exercising their agency in order to comply with sociocultural norms and religious parameters. Mustafa and Troudi (2019) stress the importance of agency compliance in their study for two reasons. First, it supports the fact that different forms of agency are constructed from different cultural contexts. Second, the performance of ‘agency maneuvers’ can be used to address western accusations that describe Muslim women as victims and marginalised.

Moreover, critical factors that must be considered in examining professional identity for Saudi women are the concepts of women's agency and empowerment in the Saudi context**.** Mustafa and Troudi (2019) discussed the Saudi women agency by considering many types of agency. First is the "nonliteral pious agency" that came from studying Muslim Egyptian women. This agency explains "how Egyptian women conform to religious ideals and transform themselves into virtuous Muslim subjects, which is a type of agency that goes against the assumptions of Western feminism" (p. 136). Second is "compliant agency" or "docile agency" that explains "the interaction of women with and embrace of religious traditions while still remaining bound to the marginalization that is prescribed by a particular interpretation of Islam" (p. 136). The third is "confinement agency", "where women are confined to predefined spaces of agency that condemn them to a life of domesticity" (p. 136). It "describes the interaction of women with and critical embrace of religious traditions to better themselves and pull away from seclusion" (p. 136).

Studies of Saudi women's empowerment has shown the importance of a particular type of female empowerment called *Tamkeen Almara'ah*, which reflects the meaning of women's empowerment in the Middle Eastern, Saudi context (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Le Renard, 2014; Quamar, 2016; van Geel, 2012). The importance of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* differs according to its kind but is similar in its purpose of dealing with women's status in society, sociocultural norms and the conservative masculine society. Van Geel (2012) introduced women's empowerment in its Middle Eastern context as *Tamkeen Almara'ah* by exploring women's ideas about women liberation (*Tahrer Almara'ah*), empowerment (*Tamkeen*), and the rise of women (*Alnohodh be Almara'ah*). She stated that *Tamkeen Almara'ah* begins with "financial awareness and ability" (van Geel, 2012, p. 72), and suggested two kinds of trajectories in order to achieve "empowered women": top-down and bottom-up *Tamkeen* initiatives. Top-down initiatives contain three strategies: (1) *islah* (reform), which is political

reform; (2) raising awareness, consciousness of women's rights, and (3) segregated public spaces: the common belief by Saudi women that the only way to reach true *Tamkeen* is through mixing society (*ikhtilat*), therewith learning to deal with men in public (van Geel, 2012, p. 73). Bottom-up initiatives contain three main strategies: (1) reclaiming women, meaning claiming the rights of women from women's status of Islamic perspective; (2) education, meaning women obtaining good education; and (3) political empowerment, meaning increasing the awareness why women are needed to participate in political decision making (van Geel, 2012).

However, it is essential to state that Saudi women are a nonhomogeneous group. Each has her own characteristics and interests in relation to her socio-economic, regional, tribal, or sectarian elements. Saudi professional women leaders face pressure at three levels, as explained by Thompson (2015): First, family restricts women to the family tradition and to home responsibilities. Second, the social level with the different roles that women play simultaneously with their extended families while at the same time being responsible for their small nuclear family. Third, the national level, regarding their work performance as it is under continuous scrutiny. Although Saudi women are nonhomogeneous, they share "resilience and uncanny ability to juggle home, family, work and social obligations; a balancing act that needs to be practised at all times" (Thompson, 2015, p. 25). Some women leaders are working towards overcoming the traditional image of women in Saudi Arabian society by being proactive and having courage in decision making. These women are challenging the pressures of society by being involved in a male-dominant culture (Thompson, 2015). According to Alkhaled and Berglund (2018), Saudi women entrepreneur carry the responsibility to empower other Saudi women by their entrepreneurship experiences.

Within these differences, the changing status of Saudi women began among Saudi professional women, who are willing to correct the negative image of Saudi women that is

popular around the world, such as the claim that they are oppressed and do not have rights. As Thompson (2015) claims, women leaders in Saudi Arabia can transform the negative image by creating a new female identity that is open to change. Thompson found that Saudi women leaders have the ability of questioning the myth of Saudi tradition as they recognise the importance of being assertive and brave in introducing ideas and solutions that address difficulties in which Saudi women are facing. They are also aware of the importance of being recognised and respected as their male counterparts. Gender factors should not marginalise Saudi women leaders as they shape the agent for changes in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, van Geel (2016) examined Saudi women activities in "the only for women" public space in Saudi Arabia. The concluding part of van Geel's study led to questioning how women should participate in public and shed light on women's attitudes and strategies about their presence. However, an in-depth examination of Saudi women's experiences in professional identity formation is still required. Although Thompson (2015) offers study for Saudi women leaders in the profession, considering the culture, social and gender aspects of Saudi women. It is better to examine the situation by Saudi women researchers, as the present research does.

In exploring the impact of the cultural, social, and gender background in their lives, Saudi women express types of identity negotiation and management. Alfurayh and Burns (2020) explore how Saudi women studying in Australia experience identity modification. The study questions the impact of a different culture's 'individualism' on Saudi women's perceptions of their cultural roles, how Saudi women's personal and social identities are reshaped within the new culture, and the influence of this experience on their future. The study found that Saudi women reshape, develop, and reinterpret their identity while maintaining a clear presentation of their Islamic identity. However, the new environment of Australian culture offers them an opportunity to develop and change their gender role. Another study by Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern (2015) explores how Saudi women studying in the US

adjust to differences in the sociocultural context of women. This study reports that Saudi women experience changes in their confidence, independence, and intellect while studying in the US. Their acceptance of others also increases. These studies are helpful to this thesis due to the lack of empirical studies of identity construction of Saudi women in sociocultural contexts. However, these studies reveal only partly how Saudi women experience other cultures from the perspective of their gender and cultural identity.

Therefore, professional identity needs construction. Nonetheless, there is a long history of changes that Saudi women have gradually experienced, and within these changes, an image has been drawn, and identity has been shaped not just by the women themselves but by their society (AlMunajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986; Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). The status of Saudi women in society in the past has shown them as something private and not 'for public' (Deaver, 1980). Thus, the personal identity of Saudi women is considered a private identity, an alternative to a personal identity. Further, discussing Saudi women and identity will touch many aspects, including the personal (private) identity of women, expressions of identity as roles that women play in society within many other forms of identity. These include national identity, cultural identity, family identity, and ideal identity of Islamic women (Guta & Karolak, 2015; Mtango, 2004). Thus, women's identity becomes a symbol that represents particular roles in society. For example, Saudi women with traditional clothes and ways of wearing Hijab became a symbol of Saudi Arabia. Thus, studying professional identity construction among Saudi women must consider all these identity roles – national, cultural, and familial – in addition to the role of personal identity in the formation process.

Identity and professional identity construction

Individual identities are often considered flexible and ongoing projects that need active and continued construction (Paullen, 2006). When individuals work on their identity meanings, they are engaged in a variety of activities to build, revise, fix, repair, and craft their self-identities. Therefore, we cannot look at identity just in terms of shaping values, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours; we must also understand it to perform as a personal enterprise. Going deeper, if individuals (Saudi women, in this research) consider their social and cultural identity in their identity construction, this may cause an ongoing struggle with their personal identity as a 'woman' and their different other identities, such as social, cultural, and family identity. This situation calls for identity negotiation or management in the process of identity construction. Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2006) explain this situation as "an ongoing process takes place in which the individual negotiates the "Who am I?" question amidst social "This is who we are" messages. As both individuals and their social contexts are dynamic, so will be the relationship between them" (p. 1032). The individual responds actively to this dynamic by doing what Snow and Anderson (1987) categorised 'identity work'. According to Snow and Andersons, identity work is a "range of activities that individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348). Identity work includes "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

Furthermore, several studies provide evidence for the importance of the identity narrative concept in studying identity construction. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) stress the importance of studying identity work narrative as "people 'story' their role transitions, making use of narrative to instate a sense of continuity between who they have been and who they are

becoming, as well as to obtain validation from relevant parties" (p. 136). Slay and Smith (2011) used narrative to examine professional identity construction under the conditions of stigmatized cultural identity. Their study suggests a redefinition process of professional identity through identity work narrative by discussing the way that professional experiences, cultural and family values steer the professional posable selves' repertoire as multiple redefinition tasks construct the professional identity. The statement above disagrees with Ibarra (1999), who used redefinition tasks rather than adoption tasks in professional identity construction. Ibarra (1999) described the ways many adapt to new professional roles and construct a professional identity by experimenting with provisional selves as a temporary solution to bridge the gap between their current selves and the expected attitudes and behaviours of their new role. The identity narrative concept is important for understanding the dynamics of identity in every macro-work role transition. During identity work, there is emphasis on sustaining authentic feelings regardless of the changes that an individual is experiencing, as it helps to fashion an appropriate cultural self that is presented in stories that are suitable for a new professional group or communities (Ibarra, 2004; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Louis, 1980). Thus, identity work narrative provides of critical insights into identity negotiation and avoid confusion, as Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) explain. People craft and negotiate identity work by following practices and strategies. However, missing from this research is the perspective of Saudi women: their narrative and performance in professional identity construction for both professional social media platforms and for their day-to-day life during online personal branding.

Personal branding as a form of identity work

Several studies on identity work have developed theoretical and conceptual models and frameworks. First, Ibarra (1999) explained how junior professionals use provisional selves as

a temporary solution to bridge the gap among their current capacities and self-concept and the new professional role expectations of attitudes and behaviours. The research proposes three task-adaption models: first, observing role models, second, experimenting with provisional selves, and finally, evaluating outcomes depending on internal standards as well as external feedback. These tasks are directed by the adoption repertoire that came from the situational influences and individual influences. Second, Kreiner et al. (2006) developed an identity work model that expresses the complex interactions that took place among the person and situational influences as individuals strove for optimal balance. The model illustrates the way that individuals utilise different tactics to differentiate or integrate their personal and social identities. Also, Lepisto, Crosina, and Pratt (2015) built an integrated conceptual model of identity work, considering various definitions, including different processes of identity construction as well as its motivated and targeted nature. The model highlights many core elements that shape identity work in the general model: identity motives, triggers, processes and tactics, and outcomes. After they propose the identity work model, they extend the model by exploring identity work for professionals. For their study, the authors found that studying professionals can benefit theories of identity work by offering new forms of identity motives and triggers and recasting identity work as a relational operation.

Weisgerber and Butler (2016) claim that the process of personal branding that exists is insufficient to understand the nature of identity work online. As they stated:

> …the branding metaphor itself points to a process of enslavement rather than empowerment. Designing a brand identity is inherently restrictive in that it demands that we limit our self-presentation to the projection of a diminished aspect of ourselves for the sake of consistency. This demand, as we have seen, is not only unrealistic, but the concealment work necessary to succeed in this endeavour also carries a slew of health risks, which further calls into question the notion of empowerment (p. 29).

Similarly, Oswick and Robertson (2007) also explore personal branding and identity by doing textual analysis consider personal branding as a form of identity work and looking at its detrimental influence on the ongoing process of identity management, organisation, and construction. Showing that personal branding engenders anxiety, fosters dissimulation, and encourages safe and compliant actions. However, none of these studies consider identity work in a sociocultural context nor for a specific gender. This thesis addresses this gap by examining online personal branding using the professional social media platform, LinkedIn.

Studies have discussed online personal branding to understand how people use social media networks and other online platforms to create personal brands (Bridgen, 2011; Chen, 2013; Harris & Rae, 2011; Karaduman, 2013). Such studies define personal branding in the context of individuals establishing their reputations or promoting themselves by carefully designing their online presence and analysing their online performance. For instance, in a study on self-performance on Twitter, Papacharissi (2012) explained that successful online users are careful about how they communicate, including their writing style and grammar, as these aspects can influence others' perceptions of the writer's identity. Using social media as a personal branding tool can be useful for employees, as it enables them to communicate and present themselves in positive ways (Vallas & Cummins, 2015). For example, well-known employees who are considered experts in their areas can benefit their organisations through the popularity of their personal brands (Karaduman, 2013). Thus, personal branding online gives, professionals the opportunity to show their knowledge and quality of work online (Karaduman, 2013; Vallas & Cummins, 2015).

With the opportunities that social media networks provide, one's online personal brand can reflect different online identities, for professional or personal purposes (Karaduman, 2013). Researchers in different disciplines, such as consumer research, media, communication, and

information technology, have explored the significance of creating an online personal identity (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010; Harris & Rae, 2011; Nolan, 2015; Papacharissi, 2009) as personal brands (Brooks & Anumudu, 2016). Such studies conclude that a personal brand can play an important role in advancing the achievements and career of an individual (Correa et al., 2010; Harris & Rae, 2011; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Nolan, 2015; Papacharissi, 2009). Employees form their professional online identities within their daily jobs when they professionally engage with social media by treating their identities as commodities (Hearn, 2008). However, the above studies tend to consider personal branding process as easy, without any challenges or difficulties that affect branding authenticity or the problems many created for the branded person in real life.

Brooks and Anumudu (2016) discuss challenges in building online personal brands. They find that practical instruction for creating personal brands contains narratives of identity that hide the conscious awareness of educators and learners' curriculum. Additionally, developing a strategy for an extended self-presence online might promise more employment opportunities – or the danger that contributing to an online community for someone's narrative identity might lead to loss control that could devastate careers. Moreover, maintaining authenticity is a challenge that individuals can face when creating various brands for different audiences (Labrecque et al., 2011). In addition, the branded person may focus on avoiding branding failure by suppressing stories that harm the branding message (Labrecque et al., 2011). Expectations from an online presence and face-to-face meeting may not match in the minds of the audience, causing branding failure (Labrecque et al., 2011).

Personal branding research emphasises the importance of establishing a personal brand on social media platforms. Still, none explores the influence of culture, which is a substantial element contributing to a person's identity formation (Hearn, 2008). According to Harris and

Rae (2011), a strong personal brand has four characteristics: “reputation, trust, attention and execution” (p. 16). However, employees with effective personal brands can pose a threat to their employer, as a successfully branded employee can leverage his or her power within an organisation. Personal branding can empower employees, especially those who build their brand, by identifying their value proposition to give themselves a competitive advantage. The value propositions of employees constitute to their professional presence in their organisation, distinguishing them from their peers and raising awareness of their professional identity (Morgan, 2011). Thus, the self-brand can provide such employees with a competitive advantage within organisations that enables them to compete regarding their career improvement (Vosloban, 2013). Nonetheless, with self-branding practices, the person must meet the authentic or real self with all one’s beliefs, experiences, and knowledge.

Studies of online personal branding have covered both individuals and organisations. Researchers have, for instance, studied individuals by examining their performances on Facebook and LinkedIn, considering the purposes of their engagement on social media, e.g., self-expression, communication, and self-promotion, by identifying differences in personal and professional identities (Dijck, 2013). A study conducted by Schau and Gilly (2003) explored the concept of personal branding, not on social media, but rather on personal websites, by examining the construction of identity, self-presentation, and online communication and comparing these aspects to the individuals’ real-life identities. Therefore, to introduce the research context, the following section identifies LinkedIn as a professional personal branding tool to explain the various usage in this professional social media platform. In addition, this section will also discuss the ways an online personal brand is useful when utilising LinkedIn.

This thesis uses LinkedIn as the research context to examine user experience and understands identity work during online personal branding in professional social media

platforms. Due to LinkedIn's professional focus, Reynolds (2013) considers it a 'business lounge', as it provides a platform for job seekers to present their qualifications and interact with employers by presenting themselves as products. On LinkedIn, individuals can collect recommendations, among other features, which may benefit their professional standing and contribute to the development of their personal brand. Thus, it is useful for professionals to set up a LinkedIn profile, whether it is to find jobs or present themselves to the world. In addition, employers who are looking for employees with unique qualifications or skill sets could search for them on LinkedIn. Through their LinkedIn profiles, job seekers can, thus, create good impressions even before their face-to-face interviews with the company (Reynolds, 2013).

Rangarajan, Gelb, and Vandaveer (2017) discuss personal branding strategies and how they can be effective. They claim that, considering a personal brand as an aggregate of impressions communicated by a person, most of those impressions are likely to arise from social media platforms. Nonetheless, social media usage could vary these impressions. For example, the users of LinkedIn profiles highlight their personal brands and their interaction with the brands of organisations and employers. Three situations are reflecting the usage of LinkedIn in terms of identification and engagement. First are profiles that show the job history of an individual, with small numbers of endorsements and nothing more. Second is a profile constructed that might strategically showcase a professional who summarises his or her employer brand with tactics such as displaying an employer's logo conspicuously, following an employer's organisations, registering client logos, or promoting an organisation's products. The third possible LinkedIn user might follow a different strategy, therefore, create a personal brand while networking by concentrating on his or her professional function. By aiming for very specific endorsements, sharing blogs, and participating in talks, one can show his or her career and positions held as an officer in an industry (Rangarajan et al., 2017). Regardless, the actual experiences of LinkedIn members need to be investigated in the context of all preceding

interaction characteristics. Hence, all details of character interactions participate in building an online personal brand in the sociocultural context of LinkedIn.

Re-negotiating the identity of Saudi Women on social media platforms

As a striking result of using the Internet in Saudi Arabia, society members have experienced a significant shift in present communication patterns. On the one hand, online participation is fruitful for the Saudi community by giving participants a great opportunity to learn from their communication with each other in terms of online and offline sharing (Al-Saggaf & Begg, 2004). For Saudi participants, online interaction is a gateway or opening for expressing ideas and views as well as an opportunity to express themselves, complain about social issues of everyday life, and use it for entertainment or to relax and enjoy their life (Al-Saggaf & Williamson, 2004). On the other hand, Saudi women have a channel for communication due to the sociocultural rules such as gender segregation in real life to open communication in the virtual world, resulting in several benefits and challenges for Saudi women (Al-Saggaf & Williamson, 2004). Talking about Saudi women and their access to social media, therefore, could be presented in many different cases and ways (Al-Saggaf & Begg, 2004; Al-Saggaf & Williamson, 2004; Al-Saggaf, Williamson, & Weckert, 2002; Alsharkh, 2012; Guta & Karolak, 2015; Oshan & S, 2007).

The uses of social media by women differ in why, how, and when they choose to use it, for both personal and professional purposes (Aljuwaiser, 2018; Alsaggaf, 2015; Alsharkh, 2012; Altuwayjiri, 2019; Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2017; Chen, 2015; Guta & Karolak, 2015; Kietzmann et al., 2011; Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Recent research has examined online practices of Saudi women and their cultural values, norms, and traditions in social media consumption. Studies have explored topics including the relationship between

online practices of Saudi women and changes in aspects of Saudi culture. These include veiling and communication between genders (Aljuwaiser, 2018), identity construction on Facebook (Alsaggaf, 2019), the benefits, and the ability to use Internet in order to bridge sociocultural norms and values to construct new identities.

One of the most popular strategies of online appearance is when Saudi women try to protect their privacy within their cultural and social boundaries by employing various tactics in conversations (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Guta & Karolak, 2015). For example, in terms of their identity, they may use nicknames (i.e., hiding their personal images and utilizing their first names rather than full names) to avoid being identified by family names. Another common tactic among female Saudi users is using multiple accounts (Guta & Karolak, 2015). Without any kind of control, by using the Internet, Saudi women experience multiple new ways of expressing and identifying themselves online in situations that exclude the dominance of the female body in favour of just the female thoughts (Guta & Karolak, 2015). The other benefit for Saudi women appearing on social media is their activity through gaining knowledge of their rights and exercising freedom of speech (Al-Saggaf et al., 2002; Alsharkh, 2012). For example, the experiences of Saudi women on Facebook lead them to become more social and raise their self-confidence (Al-Saggaf, 2011). Finally, social media offers Saudi women a forum for expressing their political opinions online (Al-Saggaf, 2011). Yet, this online presence and these patterns of usage will be investigated in relation to the tensions that women may experience when they use, engage, or participate in social media platforms to identify themselves, considering Saudi women's cultural boundaries in real life and to what extent they carry these boundaries with them when they are in the virtual world.

However, for women, the use of the Internet worldwide tends to be similar except for the impact of cultural background (Alsaggaf, 2015). Most women use the Internet as an

information resource, learning tool, publishing place, communication tool, sense of community, and freedom channel (Chen, 2015; Creedon, 2014; Newsom & Lengel, 2012). Women might face problems, such as technological barriers, access limitations, and cultural barriers (Newsom & Lengel, 2012; Oshan & S, 2007). In addition, online responses for women may vary by different social media platforms and over time, depending on, for example, the level of intercultural sensitivity, i.e., "the affective facet of intercultural communication competence" (Coffey, Kamhawi, Fishwick, & Henderson, 2013, p. 606). As was reported by Coffey and co-workers, women paid great attention to online content and were primarily interested in feelings and in understanding others. Thompson and Lougheed (2012) showed differences in men's and women's usage of Facebook. By investigating social media usage as a portion of women's everyday routines, Thompson and Lougheed found that women spend much more time on Facebook than men. In emotional terms, the study found that women were more likely to experience feelings of stress, anxiety, and unhappiness when they did not access Facebook. This platform allowed them to express their emotions easily; therefore, it made them happier and energized them more than it did men. This finding was confirmed in studies of Saudi women's usage as well (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Guta & Karolak, 2015) as discussed earlier. Yet, it is critical to explore the way in which Saudi women use professional social media platforms such as LinkedIn. What can LinkedIn provide to Saudi professional women that is related to their background and status?

Therefore, considering the background and reality of Saudi women, their need to be recognised and the changes that are happing in Saudi Arabia toward *Tamkeen Almara'ah,* the question is: how do Saudi women construct their professional identity? Specifically, this thesis addresses the way that Saudi women adopt a collective identity 'we' and form a professional identity 'me' by using online personal branding. Since personal identity for Saudi women is considered private (or secret), and their identity work is affected by cultural, social, gender and

family values, using online personal branding could help them in their professional identity construction.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

An interpretive methodology was chosen to investigate the online personal branding of Saudi professional women. This chapter will discuss the research methodology by identifying the research paradigm, data collection, reflexivity and data presentation and analysis.

Interpretivist research paradigm

The term *paradigm* explains a system of ideas or a world view that a community of researchers uses to generate knowledge. Guba and Lincoln (1998) view the paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (p. 185); Denzin and Lincoln (1998) claim that "all research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (p. 26). Paradigms inform the research strategy of the number of assumptions and criteria of accuracy that are shared by that community and taken for granted. There are four main interpretive paradigms that construct qualitative research: (1) positivist and post-positivist, (2) constructivist-interpretive, (3) critical, and (4) feminist-post-structural (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Each of these paradigms represents a different world view, requiring selecting different approaches to observe and measure the phenomenon under study. A paradigm includes three elements: (1) ontology, (2) epistemology, and (3) methodology. Ontology questions the nature of reality. Epistemology asks about the nature of knowledge, i.e., the way we know the world and the relationship between the enquirer and the known. Methodology concentrates on the way individuals gain knowledge about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Research from an interpretivist paradigm addresses deep interpretation of the complex world based on the experience of the people who have lived that experience, using an interpretivism research approach in the methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Hiller (2016) explains:

> From the interpretivist perspective, knowledge constructions are understandings from inside the meanings of participants and therefore also embody those persons' contextual meanings. In other words, an interpretivist researcher seeks to gain access to the developed meanings that participants bring to experiences and that entail the broad cultural and experiential worlds from which those individual's perspectives and beliefs are formed (p. 103).

Interpretivism provides general directions instead of explanations for what is seen. It aims to understand lived experiences in the complex world from the point of view of the actor who is living those experiences, in order to understand the meaning and the actor's definition of a situation (Patton, 2015). Interpretivism research emphasises the importance of interpreting the world to understand its meaning, and the researcher must clarify the meaning construction process and elucidate what and how meanings manifest in language and actions of social actors (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 1994).

The research paradigm identifies ontology, epistemology, and methodology in order to explain the basic belief system of the interpretivism paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The ontological status requires the researcher to consider the foundations of knowledge and answer the question of 'what' reality is. The nature of reality in the research is explained by accepting the real world as being very important in terms of the interaction between objective reality and the subjective experience of people. However, reality has multiple perspectives and is constructed in situations that people subjectively experience in their minds (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Thus, individuals makes sense of the world by living it. The ontological position

considers that the changing nature of culture and the roles of women should be recognised. Therefore, considering the nature of the research questions and positioning the present study within the interpretive paradigm, the ontological assumptions of this research consider many realities that express the world 'out there' as it is but claims that there is no singular reality. For example, the reality of Islamic Saudi culture and society is religious, collectivist, masculine, and conservative (AlMunajjed, 1997; Altorki, 1986). The reality of the status of women in Saudi Arabian society is that they lack agency and autonomy. The reality of Muslim women in Orientalism discourse (Ahmed, 1992) is represented as silent, backward and subjugated. Then there is the reality of Saudi women in a professional context. Finally, the personal branding phenomenon, such as LinkedIn, is the reality of a professional social media platform, which is Western and individualist. Therefore, it is not easy to know the experiences of identity work of Saudi women in terms of personal online brands on LinkedIn without investigating the situation from their point of view: their beliefs, behaviours, experiences and thoughts. There is no one objective reality that explains what Saudi professional women are, what they look like or their online identity construction experiences. However, there are multiple subjective meanings of 'Saudi professional women' that the participants and the investigator continually reconstruct through the renegotiation of human interactions. Therefore, it is important to understand the epistemological question of how the researcher 'knows' the reality being investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), within the interpretivism approach. What can be known is epistemology; it considers beliefs about how a phenomenon is being known and is the production of a valid way of knowing (Hiller, 2016).

According to Hiller (2016):

> Understanding the epistemological assumptions that guide a research study means that the reader/consumer of the research can either more deeply understand the findings or can more knowledgeably challenge the findings

> and the processes that led to them. Either situation is beneficial to the nature of the research process itself and to its eventual application to real-life circumstances— which undoubtedly is the hope of all researchers (p. 100).

The interpretivist epistemological assumptions offer the research design justification and specify beliefs concerning the relationship between the knower and the known, especially, in this case, between the investigator and those under investigation. Interpretivist researchers usually include unambiguous, detailed descriptions of the ontological, epistemological, cultural, professional, and personal values and situations in relation to the topic being studied (Hiller, 2016). This supports the research integrity, exposes motivations and possible biases, and helps readers to understand how they may use the research findings. The goal is to understand, not to explain, and epistemology informs the ways that the phenomenon under examination will be understood by researchers regarding multiple realities (ontology), leading to the appropriate research methodology. In this process, the researchers and the examination object are part of the research procedures (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

The epistemological assumptions of this research are based on the ontological approach of multiple realities. In studying Saudi professional women, to gain valid knowledge, collecting data on the mindset diversity of these women, lifestyles, and ways of identifying and presenting themselves is critical. For example, (1) some women cover their faces in everyday life and cannot put personal photos online; (2) many do not cover their faces but cannot put their photos online; (3) there are women who do not cover their faces and openly put their photos online. The three kinds of women are influenced by the nature of Islamic Saudi culture and society, and their family or the nature of society, as well as their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours. Also, research studying Saudi women who are Muslim must consider the epistemological assumptions that identify Muslim women with Islamic knowledge, defined by the beliefs, values, and justifications embedded in Islamic sources (Hacinebioglu, 2007; Piela, 2013).

Studies by (Abdel-Latif & Ottaway, 2007; Alkhaled, 2021; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Karam, 1998; Karim, 2009) show that there are various stances that women take in their own environments, with advocates active yet rarely communicating with supporters of different perceptions, considering them either overly lenient or overly extreme. Thus, this research considers all perspectives and perceptions of Muslim Saudi women in the process of 'knowing'. As a Saudi woman researcher, I recognised the body language, silences, and symbolic words the subjects use or present during data collection. I analysed the lived realities and experiences of these women from inside through my subjective experience of the research data. These emotions and/or attributes demand a subjective relationship between me and the research that enabled me to be more involved and to position myself as an insider with an emic perspective.

To understand the construction of professional identity through building a personal brand online, this thesis looks at how women construct their professional identity in real life because an online presence is only an extension of a real-life existence. The study explores how these women identify themselves and why they may lack full self-identity and consider their narrative and professional-identity-construction experiences in relation to gender and social and cultural aspects. Moreover, a discussion of identity practices and considerations reflects on the tensions that they feel or experience that could encourage or prevent online branding practices because of identity construction techniques. In relation to this thesis, the study examines their ways of 'doing' self-identification as women from a conservative, masculine society to explore their online practices and tensions and to clarify some beliefs or actions related to identity work and branding themselves online.

Meaning and language are also vital to understanding how knowledge is obtained because of their influence in reflecting women's awareness of their identity and its importance.

They also help to discover to what extent the identity construction of each woman is affected by her reality or her attributes to the culture and how women construct their behaviour within actual situations, identifying the self in real life. Thus, when women initially talk about their experiences, difficulties, or even their opinions of identity construction before considering online usage and practice, they give more than the literal meaning of the words. As expressed by the statement of Attewell (1974, p. 185), "a piece of talk does not just describe an interaction; therefore, it stands for, or indexes (hence indexical) some meaningful feature of that particular situation". After exploring identity construction in real life and discovering its roots in the practices of women and backgrounds with consideration of aspects of culture and gender, I go further to research the self in both social media platforms usage and presence.

Moreover, in researching Saudi professional women online, it is important to consider Altorki (1986) insight on the role, identity, behaviour, and ideology of Saudi women. The epistemological view that calls 'polar coordination':

> …if a particular group adopts a specific set of belies as a guide to action, this does not mean. That the consequences of their behavior are direct result of the influence of those beliefs. In the same way, the kind of existence led by a particular group may induce them to adopt certain beliefs, but this does not necessarily mean that their form of existence determines the content of such beliefs (Altorki, 1986, p.21).

The research epistemological approach through the engagement of the Saudi women, helps to infer the difficulties and motivations that associated with building personal brands online—why the women need to create online personal brands as Saudi women and what factors may influence their identity construction. In addition, consideration of what does it means to do identity work online for Saudi women.

Thus, depending on ontological and epistemological assumptions, the research methodology takes an interpretivist research strategy with the aim of developing a theory from the research data, using a grounded theory approach. Given the nature of the phenomena under examination, and the research context, and a commitment to developing theoretical insights from the grounded theory analytical approach qualitative interviews were adopted.

Research methodology

The methodology is the theoretical perspective of the research design that provides an explanatory position for the goals of researchers and actions based on the research ontology and epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This study employs an interpretive methodology using the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000) to explain the circumstances of a particular phenomenon by studying the precise behaviours of individuals in a specific place at a given time (Scotland, 2012; Smith, 1983; Szmigin & Foxall, 2000; Walsham, 2006). This study calls for applying a grounded theory as a mood of interpretivism of enquiry as well as narrative methodology approach (McAlpine, 2016; McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 2001) within interpretivism methodology. The interpretive paradigm can be represented by a wide range of methodological tactics, depending on the empirical focus (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1988). Examining the identity construction and usage experiences of professional social media platforms for personal branding in a sociocultural context requires in-depth data related to those experiences.

Charmaz (2000) identifies grounded theory as:

> a methodology that has been used to generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge. It is an interpretivist mode of enquiry which has its roots in symbolic interactionism

> and as such language, gestures, expressions and actions are all considered primary to the experience (pp. 51-52).

Based on the research philosophy of the grounded theory approach, researchers construct knowledge actively and socially with existent meanings relevant to the world under examination, focusing on how people act within the individual and social context (Charmaz, 2000). My research, using the grounded theory analysis approach is helpful due to the depth level of interviews and the Saudi women narrative about their experiences. They compare identity experiences in real life with life online, with their varying perceptions and tensions. Also, they present their values and beliefs in their talk about female status in society. The data that I obtained required this approach, as they are rich and are not straightforward. This research discussed professional identity experiences while considering the status of women in society and gender, cultural, and social aspects from the view of the women themselves. Therefore, their narrative experiences as women consider their culture, society, family, and childhood, as well as women and men in society before finally considering themselves.

I consider Saudi women's narrative as a collective way of explanation, using a grounded theory approach to interpret talk as data was adopted. To be more specific I use constructivist grounded theory tradition because the analysis tradition of this approach is helpful to reveal the unspoken experiences, the elements that between the words and the meaning that related to the experience of the research participants . Grounded theory is considered an innovative research approach that contains three prevailing traditions: classic, Straussian, and constructivist (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). The differences between the three traditions depend on: first, coding procedures; second, philosophical positions; and third, their conflicting use of literature (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). A constructivist grounded theory approach was followed to analyse the research data to build theory from a cultural and gendered point of view.

Using the narrative methodology approach ensures deep interpretation of the data. The narrative offers a widow to understand identity construction as individuals form and reform their identity through narrative (McAlpine, 2016). In this study, narrative methodology helps to interpret the experiences of Saudi women professional identity construction in relation to who they are and where they are from, through an analysis of the narrative identity work the women have done online and in real life. Several studies have used the narrative approach with women in the Middle Eastern context (Alkhaled, 2021; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Alshammari, 2019; Sarnou, 2014). They have emphasised the importance of using Narrative approach in studying the culture, the social and gender background of women, as well as the status of women.

There are three reasons why grounded theory, and a narrative approach are appropriate for this research topic. First, in relation to personal branding phenomena, it considers research that may be new to academia. Research on personal branding only began in 2005, and from this time until 2017, there have been 100 journal articles written on personal branding (Gorbatov et al., 2018). However, studies that focus on cultural contexts are few, while those on gendered context are non-existent. Therefore, within the research context, social media usage might mean, for instance, examining identity work experiences of Saudi professional women and identifying the main relationships among building identity, the branding practices and the positive or negative implications of women's culture on the study. Subsequently, the modes of appearance need to be observed in relation to personal branding and its characteristics, considering the experiences of women while suspending belief about gendered and cultural aspects and tensions in these experiences, and interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon of construction their identity for online personal branding.

Second, examining Saudi professional women, collectivistic culture, and conservative masculine societies require deep interpretation. This because in examining Saudi women, you examine their personal, social, and cultural aspects. When women talk about their experience, they consider many aspects, reflecting on meanings and tensions that need to be captured and understood before being theorised. Finally, this research considers both the off-line and online experiences of identity construction narrative and performance, which express a substantial amount of data that helps build a theory.

Present work examines sociocultural identity work through online personal branding with in-depth data, drawing on a solid theoretical and empirical framework that has been missing from much research on Saudi women (Aljuwaiser, 2018; Almunajjed, 2010; Alsaggaf, 2019; Alsaggaf, 2015; Guta & Karolak, 2015; Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). Also, this study examines personal branding on the professional social media platform LinkedIn from a cultural and gendered perspective, as suggested in Labrecque et al. (2011) and Chen (2013). Therefore, this qualitative thesis adopts an interpretive research paradigm; which is inductive and naturalistic. The research interprets data and meaning from people who experience the phenomena under examination. Therefore, it uses purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions. The research questions explain 'how', 'what', and 'why' the phenomena under study are experienced from a sociocultural context by performing qualitative interviews.

Research Methods

Aiming for obtaining high-quality data that mirrors the lived experiences of Saudi professional women, the research employed qualitative in-depth interviews. The approaches allow the interpretation of the lived experiences through the characteristics of the research

participants (Goulding, 2005) and challenge any assumptions about the interpretive data and clarify the interpretation validity of the research interview (Patton, 2015).

There are studies done in either social media or identity or both, such as Guta and Karolak (2015), Al-Ahmadi (2011), Alsaggaf (2015); Mustafa (2017), Aljuwaiser (2018), Alsaggaf (2019) all used qualitative interviews, and one used an interview and online observation. None of them sought to provide an in-depth interpretation of identity construction experiences in real life before questioning them online. In addition, none of them considered the tensions implicated in online self-identification within Saudi professional women and how such women overcome these tensions. This thesis provides solutions to the research gaps mentioned above. The present study assumes that personal branding was a tool for constructing a professional identity online. The construction of identity is related to the sociocultural context and tensions that govern identity work doing online personal branding process and situation. Online personal branding is a practice that forms and reflects the types of identity Saudi professional women construct to gain opportunities in life. Al-Kahtani, Ryan, and Jefferson (2005); Al-Saggaf (2011); Al-Saggaf and Williamson (2004) and Al-Salem (2005) all conducted qualitative studies on the internet usage of Saudi women, but the researchers involved were men, who could not capture outcomes from the point of view of woman, especially within Saudi culture. This shortfall may be due to gender segregation, one of the main features of Saudi Arabian society. Thus, Saudi women in the previous studies may and/or will not have felt as comfortable as they would with a female researcher, and access to them may have been limited.

Therefore, by adopting interpretivist research methodology using grounded theory approaches to build the constructivist grounded theory tradition to analyse the data, this thesis

provides deep and rich theoretical descriptions of the sociocultural identity work through online personal branding for Saudi professional women in LinkedIn.

Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015) with 39Saudi professional women living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The professions of these women include high or middle management level, or employee, businesswomen or job seekers who have master's degree, see Appendix 2. I selected the participants by considering their gender and cultural identities as well as the similarity of their Saudi Islamic culture and they needed to have LinkedIn account or experience using LinkedIn and other social media platforms. The selection of interviewees from three regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, middle, west, and east. Appendix 1 shows the names of the cities that I travelled to and collected the data from, how far each region from the capital city of Saudi Arabia, and how many interviewees from each region.

In preparing for the interviews, I was aware of the importance of reflecting the personal significance of my research by using my personal brand logo in the materials associated with conducting the interviews, such as the folder that held my papers and the participants' consent form. I used A4 paper with my personal logo to indicate my professionalism and lend the interviews gravity and importance. The motive behind this approach to express the importance of my research topic by discussing it with the participants and offering myself as an example when they meet with me and formed their first impression of a Saudi professional woman or researcher, see Figure 3.1. Gratifyingly, most of the participants told me that the interview helped them to reflect on themselves, and they mentioned that I had asked questions that they had never asked themselves, especially those concerned with identity.

Figure 3.1: Example of one interview shows the presence of my personal logo

Moreover, I gave participants incentives to express my gratitude for their participation in the interviews. For about three months in advance, I pondered what I could give my interview participants, who are professional women. I appreciated their time and was looking for something to support their professional lives daily, but because there were 39 women, I wanted something that is not too expensive. Therefore, to focus on the importance of having a personal brand and using myself as an example, I considered what useful gift I could offer from the things that I have and love and that could help them improve their lives and outlooks. I came up with the idea of cards that I call Morning Message cards, see Figure 3.2. These were based on the photos that I have taken every morning in Sydney in the past two years, on which I write wise, helpful morning messages before posting them to my Snapchat account for people who follow me to see and ponder on those words. I designed the cards and printed them in a way that allows a participant to randomly choose one card each morning to get her message for the day. I imagined that these would encourage my participants to improve themselves even after the research interview and remind them of building personal brands. I gave them the

Morning Message cards with a letter of thank you in which I expressed my heartfelt gratitude for their time and helped with the project and for taking the initiative to participate, see Figure 3.3 the translated letter has been provided in Appendix 3.

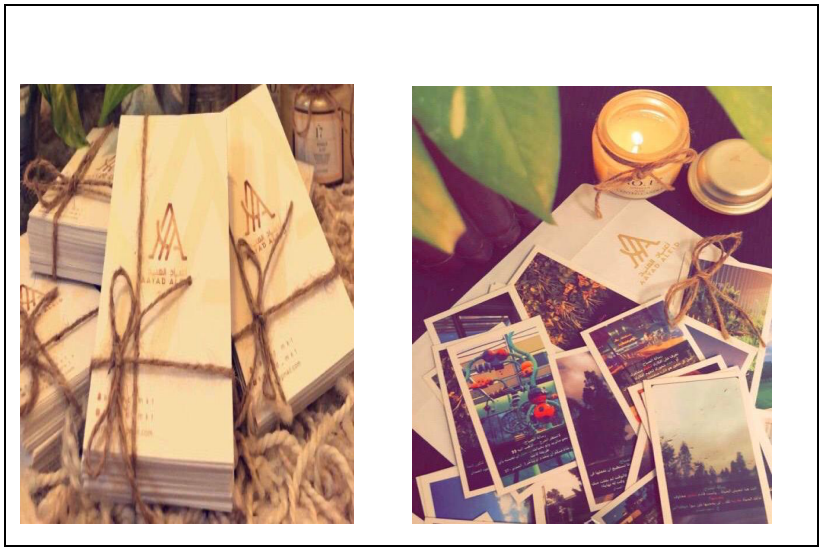


Figure 3.2: Participants' incentives: The Morning Message cards

Figure 3.3: Example of the participants' thanks and gratitude letter

It was an amazing feeling and experience to interview successful, unique, and ambitious women from my beloved country. Most of the time, I could not hide my proud feelings and happiness for their success. I was fully present and connected to them when they identified

themselves to me and talked about their success. I believe that I could do this because I am one of them, and I know what it is like to be this kind of woman in Saudi Arabian society. Some participants were young professionals, and they appreciated participating in my research. Other participants were more established and were very supportive and proud of me as a Saudi researcher. Many participants were from business and marketing backgrounds, and they told me that the main reason they agreed to participate was that we had similar interests and specialties. They were very happy to meet a successful female Saudi marketer. One participant was a student I had taught in her first year of university, and now, she is a middle manager in a private hospital. Therefore, my research sample was varied, as it comprised relatives, friends, and new people, whom I was delighted to meet. However, I interviewed two sisters who have very different personalities. This research was one of the most enjoyable activities I have done in my life.

Study sample

The research sample follows a selective sampling design, as the participants are selected by their living experience of the phenomenon under study (Goulding, 2005). Also it is purposive sampling (Higginbottom, 2004), as the characteristics of the participants are determined within the context of the research, namely, Saudi professional women. Thus, as I study the same group and subgroup— professional women who are Muslim and Saudi—I consider a selective and purposeful sampling design strategy (Higginbottom, 2004; Patton, 2015).

I recruited interviewees using the snowball technique after I tried another unsuccessful technique. I recruited my research participants in many ways. First, I used LinkedIn to search for Saudi professional women, and I sent 10 direct messages to ask for their participation. Of the women I contacted, three responded—two agreed to participate, and one expressed her

interest but said that she was on holiday overseas. Of the two that agreed to participate, one stopped responding to messages. The other was a graduate student from Qassim University, my workplace, and knew me personally. In addition, I sent direct messages through Twitter, because it is very popular in Saudi Arabia, but I received no responses. Therefore, recruiting participants via LinkedIn and Twitter was ineffective, so I began using the snowball technique to overcome the difficulties of recruiting the participants (Jamali, 2009; Alkhaled, 2013). I communicated with friends and family all around Saudi Arabia to find participants. My inclusion criteria stated that participants had to have LinkedIn accounts, and they had to be businesswomen or employees. The study was started in the capital city of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, and the first interviewee was my cousin. Then, I began to recruit professional women with whom I had a personal connection. Through them, other participants were discovered. The goal was to reach high-level professionals, but this aim was challenging to achieve. This shortfall was attributed to the period of data collection, during the summer holiday, in which many have travelled. Interviews with popular professional women, such as Badryah El-Bishr and Kother Al-Arbash, who write and talk about Saudi women, would have been ideal but I have not tried to communicate with them due to the short period of time I had for data collection.

This work did not consider women a homogenous group in society, and my research sample comprised three kinds of the woman (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). The first kind of woman covers her face in everyday life and cannot put personal photos on social media platforms online. The second kind does not cover her face but cannot put her personal photos online. The third kind of woman does not cover her face and can put her personal photos online. These three kinds of the woman were interviewed, so I was aware of this diversity. When I met with each type of woman, I followed the same conventions they followed. That is, when I interviewed women who covered their faces, I also covered my face, and when I interviewed

women who did not cover their faces, I also left my face uncovered. I did this, because I wanted to make participants feel comfortable and minimise the differences between us.

Saudi women as a research sample

When I introduced myself to Saudi professional women, I needed to develop a persona that extended beyond my usual identity as a female Saudi researcher. I expressed the meaning and situation I was questioning in the research interview questions. This was related to me as a researcher; however, Saudi professional women have been raised in a collectivist culture, so it is important to consider many factors when questioning their identity, tensions, and life experiences. First, their Islamic identity must be considered, which may depend on their family culture, mindsets, and sometimes, region of the country in which they live. Second, Saudi Arabian society is male dominated, so some women may find it difficult to express themselves or explain their experiences without considering the influence of the men in their lives. Thus, it can be difficult for them to talk about themselves as individuals. Third, it is important to consider dominant social norms and values and to ask for clarification of the meaning behind a woman's experience, because if she has practiced something for a long time due to social norms and values without thinking about what she really prefers, then she may not realise that there are alternative ways of being. In addition, it is common for social norms and values to be combined with the Islamic religion. Fourth, some women are dominated by men in their families, and these men could view their research participation as threatening, as it may open their minds to alternative ways of being. This was a risk of research participation outlined in full in my ethics application. Fifth, for five to ten years, researchers who have studied Saudi women need to consider two periods of time in their research, the time before 2017 and the time after 2017, as 2017 marked an era of huge changes in the country, especially for women.

When studying both periods, researchers must be aware that 2017 was the year in which Saudi women's *Tamkeen* started in its real practises.

Data collection

The duration of the interviews was approximately 60 to 90 minutes each, which generated approximately 41 total hours of recordings. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and then translated to English. The interviews started with an explanation of the main purpose of the study and had three main parts. The first part explored the cultural identities and how participants form their real-life identities as Saudi professional women. In the second part of the interviews, I asked the participants about themselves and how they can identify themselves as Brand, questioning their ways and understanding of having a personal brand within their cultural identities, considering the dimensions of their gender and society. In the third part, I asked about the usage of social media platforms and the personal branding practices with considering their tensions and beliefs about online engagement experiences especially LinkedIn. At the end of the interview, I asked each interviewee to briefly summarise her online experience usage and personal branding as Saudi professional women. This aspect was introduced to make sure that I did not miss important issues about the experience and, I believe if someone tells a story about some situations, s/he will explain the tensions and difficulties very well.

Ethics consideration

In social research, it is imperative for ethics to be included among the research considerations. To adhere to the high standards of ethics, every research work needs to be conducted with quality and integrity, offering full information to other researchers and participants about the research purposes, methods, and usage of the research findings, what

participation in the research requires and if there are any risks involved (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Moreover, the researcher must preserve the confidentiality of information and ensure the participants' anonymity. Participation in the research should be freely and voluntarily done, avoiding any possible harm to the participants. The study must be separated from any announced conflicts of interest (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

The ethical consideration for this research was considered low risk, at the Macquarie Human Research Ethics Committees as the research sample comprised Saudi professional women. However, there was a small risk in the sense that some male family members of the participants might become unhappy over the fact that they discussed personal branding ideas, for example, having profile photos that show their face. Yet, as the participants are well-educated women already established in business with their full family's support, such risk was very minimal. Furthermore, as I am both a researcher and a Saudi citizen who grew up there, I am aware of the cultural protocols and sensitivities. Therefore, I was able to make sound judgements in terms of managing the interviews, so breaches of protocol were avoided. Finally, all data were kept confidential through re-identification.

Ethics approval was obtained from Macquarie University and research participants were offered the consent form translated in Arabic. It included the definition of personal branding and their rights. I asked the participants if they would allow me to make audio recordings during the interviews and all of them agreed. I informed them that the data will not be presented under their real name and that the information will only be used for research purposes. I explained to the participants that participation is voluntary, and they may withdraw at any time without providing a reason and without consequence. The study was explained in plain language. I gave the participants the chance to choose the language they wanted to speak during the interviews – whether English or Arabic. Some of them alternated between the two

languages during their talk, depending on the situation. Most of the participants asked me for a copy of the study once it was completed. Finally, they told me that the research topic is very interesting and that they enjoyed the interviews.

Data Analysis

In terms of analysing data, the data are approached by "stating that subcategories, perspectives, themes, or the interpretation that emerged were revealed by the data" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 492). The analysis of the data employs a part-to-whole participant accounts analysis. This proceeds within the interpretation process. I read through the full interview transcripts to capture a sense of the whole and acquire a feeling for the participants' ideas (Goulding, 2005) and I classify first order analysis. After many readings of the transcripts, I applied the inter-textual analysis by first searching the transcripts for patterns and differences and then identifying key sentences and words related to the phenomenon studied to extract significant statements (Goulding, 2005). This interpretive technique requirement is to broaden the analysis by including a wider range of accounts to achieve a holistic interpretation (Goulding, 2005). I then represented the horizon fusion between my reference frame, as an interpreter, and the interpreting transcripts (Goulding, 2005). I integrated the themes from the data into the phenomenon studied with rich description, and this is the second order analysis. Finally, the third order of analysis was to reduce the resulting themes to a fundamental structure (Goulding, 2005) to offer a description of the experiences of professional social media for Saudi professional women's online personal branding. This was the first attempt to analyse the research data but did not really express the meaning of grounded theory analysis approach. However, this method of analysis opened the door for me as a researcher to apply the constructivist grounded theory coding procedure (Kenny & Fourie, 2015) to gain deep and rich data analysis and interpretation.

I gathered the data on Excel sheets according to the main categories that I acquired from the first round of analysis and then the data analysis following Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory coding. It consists of two main stages: first, initial open coding, and second, re-focused coding, resulting in constructivist grounded theory coding (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). In the initial stage of coding, I employed two key questions: what is the chief concern of participants? Further, how do they resolve this concern? These questions offer invaluable insight into collected data and encourage me as a researcher to code for the actions and the theoretical cues instead of themes. As Charmaz suggested, coding with "gerunds, that is, noun forms of verbs, such as revealing, defining, feeling, or wanting, helps to define what is happening in a fragment" (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1279). This process reveals implicit procedures that connect between codes and keep the analysis active and emerging. Here is where I formed the first themes from my analysis, see Figure 3.4.

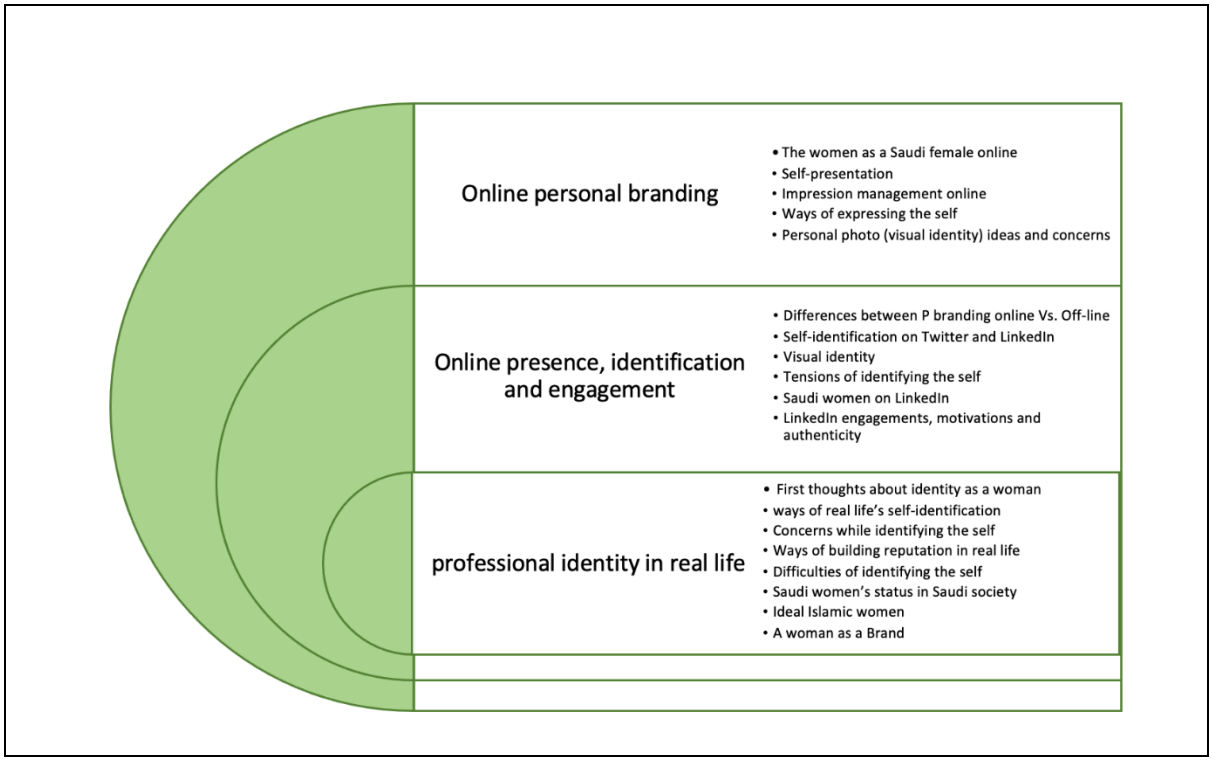


Figure 3.4: First-order analysis

In the second stage of re-focused coding, the significant codes illustrating the studied phenomenon were identified. The codes in the second stage offer analytical momentum and are elevated as a provision of theoretical categories that select or focus through the theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and memo writing of grounded theory techniques (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

> Charmaz's coding procedure is patently more interpretative, intuitive, and impressionistic than the Classic or Straussian GT (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz placed a particularly strong emphasis on in-depth, intensive interviewing to purposely yield an intimate exploration of the meanings that participants attribute to their experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Hallberg, 2006, p. 1279).

The second stage represents the final themes of the sociocultural identity work through online personal banding for Saudi professional women. It is represented in two main categories; first, professional identity construction in real life, which inform the main themes that manage the identity construction process, such as values, experiences, concerns, and women status in society. Also, it represents that in each part of the women's narrative and performance, they reflect the meaning of *Tamkeen* or *Tahmeesh Almara'ah* and the impact on their identity construction process in both positive and negative ways. The second category is the identity work via online personal banding, which represents themes that reflect identity work in gender and sociocultural contexts, while still considering social media experience, online tensions, identity motives, and personal branding practices within the context, see Figure 3.5.

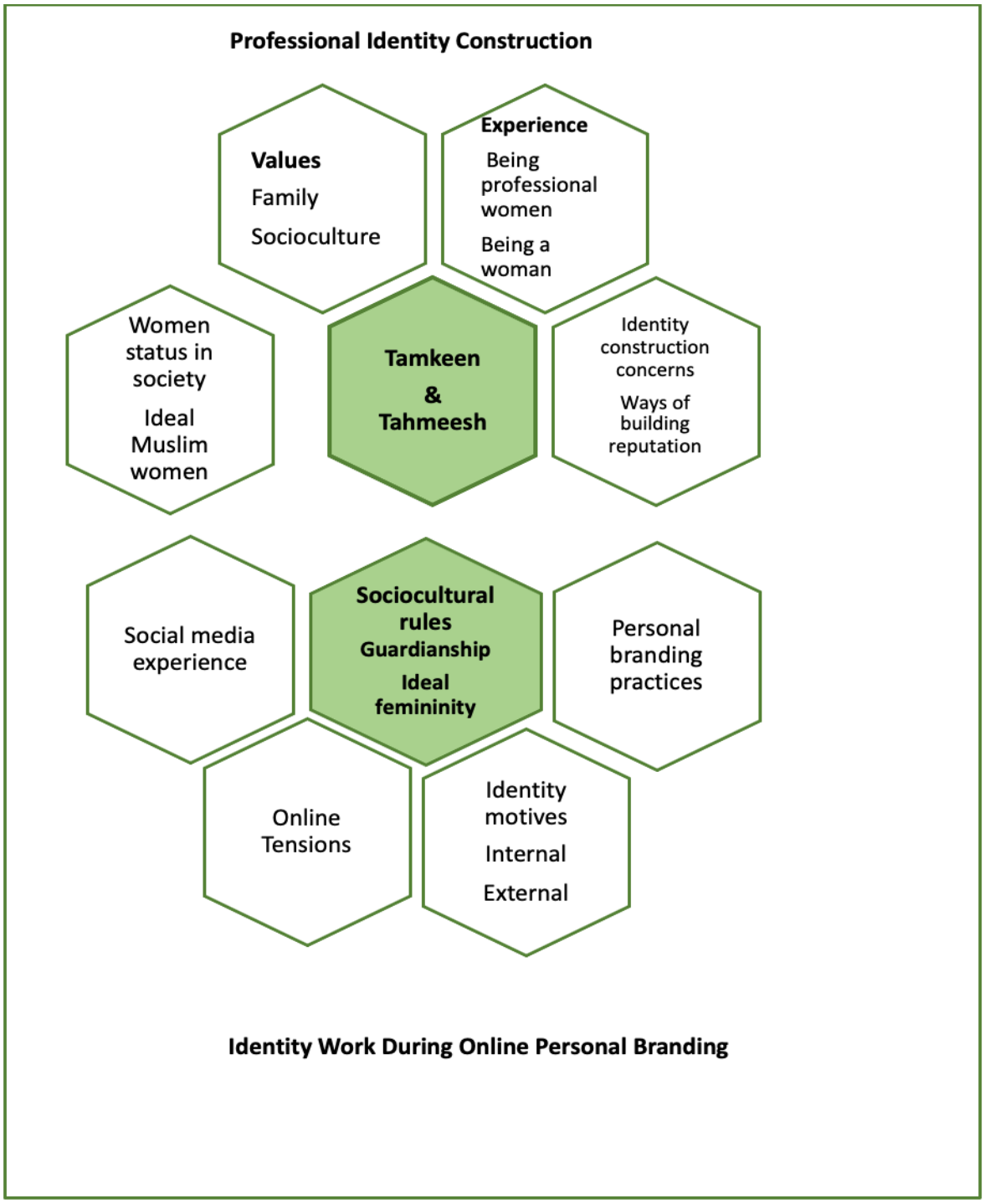


Figure 3.5: Analysis final themes

Reflexivity

Reflexivity ensures that the qualitative rigours of Hamdan (2009, pp. 378-379) identify reflexivity as "a metaphysical analysis of the researcher's account; one that examines

the input of the researcher in the research process. It involves the researcher observing him or herself in the act of observing, researching him or herself in the act of researching". Reflexive researchers are aware of the prospective impact of these factors and have the ability to step back and look critically at their own function in the research process. Reflexivity in research requires aiming to improve the quality and validity of a study and recognising the limitations of knowledge production, which results in more rigorous research (Ahmed, Hundt, & Blackburn, 2011; Berger, 2015; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). One very interesting book by Altorki (1988), written by a group of female Arab researchers reflecting on their field research and studies on their societies, expresses in detail the situations, experiences, and circumstances of researching one's society. It shows how it is critical to reflect on the research as well as the researcher within the research process.

Moreover, in developing knowledge, reflexivity pays great attention to diverse elements, such as languages, societies, politics, and theories, that intertwine during the construction, interpretation, and writing of empirical material (Ahmed et al., 2011; Berger, 2015). As a part of the research process, it is important to perform research reflexivity in the use of qualitative research methodologies in social and cultural contexts, as these contexts shape and modify the research methods to meet the research sensitivity of specific social groups and settings (Ahmed et al., 2011).

Within a sociocultural research context, gender is an important consideration in the research process and methods. Due to its impact on formulating both researchers' and participants' expectations in relation to their culture and social norms (Ahmed et al., 2011), Hamdan (2009) explains her experinces as Saudi woman researcher:

> …reflexivity has exposed aspects of my identity that I did not reveal in my research endeavour. This is what I call "reflexivity of discomfort." I believe

> that reflexivity of discomfort enriched my experience in insider-outsider research, made me more aware of the value in conducting this type of research, and confirmed the importance of encouraging other researchers to follow this approach (p. 378).

In studying personal branding phenomena, when this topic was selected, I was convinced of the benefit that could be gained from studying this phenomenon. I was aware of the differences in practices but was enthusiastic to discover the tensions associated with building personal branding on a professional social media platform, LinkedIn, due to my own experience seven years ago when I used LinkedIn for the first time and became lost and confused as a Saudi professional woman. Reflecting on the research, I am surprised by the research outcomes and the critical role that a personal brand can play for Saudi professional women. I started my research with the need to understand the manner of practices and tensions, and I ended with deeper results that demonstrate the importance of having a personal brand for women from collectivist and conservative cultures and societies.

In addition, it was challenging to study the phenomenon from a different perspective. I did my master's degree research in personal branding, but I used consumer culture theory in the research, studying the experiences of using LinkedIn for personal branding among Arab migrant women in Sydney. It was not easy to switch from a marketing background to identity studies; in my analysis and interpretation, I always reminded myself not to use the same view and vision in my examination of the data. However, adopting interpretivism methodology with a grounded theory approach greatly helped me, then set aside my previous knowledge and look at my research data with an unbiased view to see reality as it was. Another challenge arose during the research interviews and involved the assumptions of the research epistemology. Being an insider researcher, I worried that I might miss some explanations from the participants because of their assumption that I understood the culture and the situation, that I was one of

them and that my knowledge would help me to understand (Hamdan, 2009). However, I was keen to listen to their experiences and points of view without any assumption whatsoever that I knew and got their expression. To deal with this challenge, I asked them to pretend that I was not from the culture and to consider what they would say in that circumstance. Also, the interview was closed with a question about the whole experience of online personal branding, considering their feelings and opinions and its advantages and disadvantages. Meanwhile, I used myself as an example, when I asked about the tensions surrounding the difficulties of online personal branding to encourage the participants to provide deeper explanations (Ahmed et al., 2011; Hamdan, 2009).

Regarding another epistemological assumption on the different lifestyles of the women who participated in the research, it was important to me to interview equal numbers of the three kinds of women to gain better knowledge, but I could not. I realised that women who cover their faces and cannot put their photo online are trying to convey their feelings of freedom and fulfilment to express that doing so is their choice and the typical image of Saudi women in Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, women who do not wear the Hijab or cover their faces also convey a sense of freedom by denying their lack of agency and deference as Saudi woman.

Moreover, the research participants had various educational levels, qualifications, and occupations and were of different ages. Upon reflection, I realised that my interactions with the participants during the interviews differed based on their ages and experience levels. When interviewing women who were younger than me, I called them young professionals, they were very enthusiastic about learning from me, and they asked me questions about how to build their careers and reputations. They fully appreciated the interview experience itself. In contrast, the participants who were older than me questioned my experiences and tried to evaluate me. Further, when describing their achievements, they talked more about the difficulties they

experienced early in their careers as Saudi women. For example, one of the participants, a branch manager in bank, began to talk about difficulties before I asked her any questions. She asked me about my LinkedIn profile, which she had read the night before our meeting.

All participants were friendly and helpful and truly valued their participation in the research, as they liked the research topic. Most of the participants told me that this was their first time participating in a research interview, expressing positive feelings toward the experience, and indicating their willingness to participate again, if needed. This experience elucidates the benefit of being an insider researcher and researching your own society (Altorki, 1988), as you can gain the support from participants. Speaking from personal branding perspective, to research your own society means you activate your value proposition (Morgan, 2011) to gain competitive advantages (Edmiston, 2014) as a researcher in the research field, and this is one of my big objectives of researching Arab professional women.

The last element of reflexivity concerns the most critical issue of the research study and may help express the value of the research. During my research period, discussions throughout Saudi Arabia focused on change. Since I began my research 2016, there have been major political, social, and cultural changes related to women.

This study focuses on changes that affect the status of women and lives in general. 2017 was the year of *Tamkeen Almara'ah,* as it is called it in Saudi Arabia. Since then, women have been undergoing a process of *Tamkeen* to raise female participation in the labour market by 30% by 2030. During the data collection period, women in Saudi Arabia also started driving. These changes affected the interview data as the participants talked about their experiences in terms of two periods of time, i.e., before the changes and after the changes began. To ensure the quality and validity of data, I added questions about the changes in Saudi Arabia and their opinion of Saudi women, while stressing the importance of distinguishing between changes

and improvements as the changes had just happened. The participants spoke about their experiences, but added that they might change their practices, since Saudi Arabian society may change. From their responses and demeanour during the interviews, I was aware that they were full of hope. This situation made me aware of the data interpretation process and the importance of considering how the participants spoke when they talk about both periods to capture their real experiences and actions rather than their intentions to act based on the changes that were occurring in the country.

Data presentation and analysis

The data and analysis will be presented in three chapters and will illustrate the profound interpretation of the research data. First, the data analysis considers identity work experience during online personal branding for LinkedIn. The analysis will explain the online identity work tensions as well as the cultural, social, and gender impact of identity work. Second, a deep interpretation and analysis will explore the reasons for having a professional identity. Finally, the data will be analysed at an even deeper level by exploring the impact of collective identity on the attitudes of Saudi women toward professional identity construction.

Chapter 4: It's Not About 'Me', It's About 'We': Saudi Women's Identity Work and Online Personal Branding

Introduction

This chapter analyses the research findings on Saudi women's identity work during online personal branding. It analyses how the identity work has shed light on more in-depth aspects of professional identity, which express the main factors that Saudi professional women consider in their professional identity construction. First, it identifies the online tensions of identity work through online personal branding. Second, it explains the impact of the cultural, social and gendered background of Saudi women on their professional identity construction by analysing their identity work on LinkedIn.

Online tensions of identity work during online personal branding on LinkedIn

Using LinkedIn as a professional platform offers people a chance to present their professional identities, engage with professional society and build networks and connections (Reynolds, 2013). LinkedIn is considered a 'business lounge' due to its professional focus and serves as a window for job seekers and workers to present themselves (Reynolds, 2013). Therefore, being on LinkedIn means narrating and creating an identity that needs to be clear, authentic, and professional. LinkedIn profiles have specific features that help in the process of professional identity construction, which is important in that a LinkedIn profile could be the first impression someone makes, even before a face-to-face meeting or two-way electronic communication (Peregrin, 2012). The clearer and truer one is in self-presentation and exposure; the more likely LinkedIn will benefit the individual. While discussing the identity work with

the research participants, it was discovered that all the tensions that women experience on LinkedIn are due to their gendered identity. Also, their lack of experience of being in the public eye, playing professional roles, presenting themselves, and forming professional networks. The appearance of tensions in women's personal branding practices results from what I described as 'LinkedIn culture shock', similar to what Aljuwaiser (2018, p. 7) called "an internet culture shock for Saudi women". The findings explain how participants work around the norms and restrictions in wise, flexible, and planned ways through managing their identities in ways that allow them to reach their professional goals in the long run. My research reveals a form of identity negotiation, considering the perspective of identity work tensions of women and their ways of overcoming or dealing with these tensions. The findings uncovered several tensions for women that arise during online personal branding on LinkedIn. The tensions are divided into two main categories: the first is LinkedIn feature tensions, while the second is sociocultural tensions.

LinkedIn feature tensions

LinkedIn contains many features: the profile, summary, qualifications, skills, and recommendations. It is a professional platform that requires true self-exposure as it is a promotional marketing tool for professionals to present themselves (Papacharissi, 2009). The research interviews consider the participants in relation to their need to identify themselves through LinkedIn. First with a profile including a personal photograph, their full name, heading, current position, and educational background. Second, is a summary that women need to write about themselves ('Summary' has recently been changed to 'About'). Third, they add experiences and skills. On LinkedIn, women can build networks through connections, participate by creating posts and liking others' posts. It is a platform that allows people to connect, network and communicate professionally. The research finding expresses various

tensions of LinkedIn features in the experience of Saudi women. Some involve profile identification like sharing personal details or a photograph, but others involve writing the summary or carrying out online engagement, networking, and communication. The form LinkedIn takes as a platform, and the gendered and sociocultural background of Saudi women generate forms of tension in Saudi women's identity work. The data below illustrate the tensions women experience and their ways of overcoming these tensions.

When the participants were asked about their experiences in creating their profiles and the ways they addressed and perceived the requirements of signing in, it was revealed that some felt tense about the profile creation due to their cultural, social, and gender-relevant backgrounds. However, at the same time, they found ways to overcome these tensions and identified themselves as required in the profile. Like many of the participants, Layla, a young professional, explained her first experience of creating a LinkedIn profile and how she drew upon her knowledge and instincts during this task, she said:

> In identifying my profile, I started to fill in my information step by step. During my work, I used to hear my co-workers talking about LinkedIn, so I visited their profiles to see what they were writing. I was not copying what they wrote, rather, I was learning from them. I wanted to see how they were using LinkedIn. I noticed many differences between them; for example, one included a quotation to indicate that she is funny. Another woman was totally professional. I explored some accounts and then began to fill in my account. At the beginning, I was always comparing my account with the accounts of other Saudi women's accounts. At that time, I had little experience, but I wanted to establish my own profile.

Layla's experiences in identifying her profile show that her lack of knowledge about being on a professional platform caused tensions in her identity work, but these tensions did not prevent her from identifying her profile. She expresses a way to overcome the identity work tensions

by completing her profile step by step while learning from other Saudi professional women on LinkedIn by looking at how they completed their LinkedIn profiles. Similarly, Najla also completed the profile creation successfully, but she experienced more confusion and uncertainty during the task. As she explained in the interview, she felt that LinkedIn was a new world for her:

> I could not understand what LinkedIn was or how to deal with this world. When should I like my friend's posts? What should I write? Then I started to check other people's accounts, and I found out that everyone has a different identity. So, I started by answering each question and made some simple changes on LinkedIn, I faced a problem in expressing my skills there.

Najla's experience of identity work, which caused tensions of knowledge and experiences, is like Layla's. Being on a professional platform online, which is public and has mass appeal contrasts with their everyday experience of being private as women in Saudi Arabian society and explains why their profile completion had confusing steps. However, most of the participants showed a willingness to learn and build their profile step by step while considering other Saudi women's experiences in their practices. Another example of profile tension is Reema, who experienced mixed feelings about LinkedIn, as she explained in depth:

> LinkedIn was classifying me as intermediate. But, when I added my experience, I became advanced; I was pleased with this improvement. LinkedIn send me a notification saying, you are advanced now. Now, after I have developed myself in professional life, I love LinkedIn and consider it a useful tool, but when I was a student, I had negative feelings towards it. I wrote that I was a volunteer at a café, but that was not enough experience, I was bothered because of my modest amount of experience, so I made a personal logo to attract people and meet LinkedIn's requirement of a profile photo. I am a competitive person; I love to take the lead in everything, and I love to do things that have never been done before.

Reema explained that her experiences in many situations and different periods of time reflect identity work tensions related to her professional experiences and qualifications. In completing her profile, Layla felt the tension of profile classification feature that LinkedIn offers. She overcame the tensions by adding professional experiences and designing a personal logo instead of using her photo to make her profile appear appropriately advanced for a professional woman. Layan explained her feelings while answering LinkedIn profile questions as 'putting pressure on [her]':

> LinkedIn questions were putting pressure on me, but not because they are private questions – in fact, they are general basic questions – but because I did not know how to answer! For example, consider the question How would you evaluate yourself in English? I cannot say that I am perfect, because perfection differs from one person to another. I might be perfect in English in someone's opinion, while an academic would consider me average in English. That is why I chose average. This point has caused me a problem.

For Layan, like many participants, the tensions related to the LinkedIn profile were due to her seeking to be not just accurate but perfect in the description process. Since being in professional public environments is a new experience for Saudi women, they consider perspectives of others in their identity work to avoid building high expectations through their LinkedIn profile. However, when I asked Hanna about her profile identification experience, she expressed her opinion of LinkedIn as a professional platform, explaining that she felt tensions on LinkedIn as a foreign platform:

> Well, it is hard for Saudi women to use LinkedIn. It is a good platform, but the bad thing about it is that it does not match with our Islamic Arab culture. The choice of patterns is more foreign in style; I cannot use Arab or Islamic patterns. For example, you have to use your personal photo. I feel that not using my personal photo is a kind of deficiency, but it does not put pressure on me because there are principles that I am following. Now if somebody –

> who is not Muslim – is looking at my account, he might feel that the account is not complete because it lacks a photo! There are no facial expressions so they cannot determine what kind of person I am.

I remembered Hanna's reaction when I asked her about the LinkedIn profile; she was aware of the platform's recommendations as to what makes a good LinkedIn profile. These requirements do not connect with who she is and where she comes from, causing her to have identity work tensions. But she deals with these tensions by trying to be satisfied with her profile by referring to the Islamic principles that she follows. Fatimah akin to Hanna, who admitted the impact of not using her personal photo in LinkedIn profile:

> Not using your personal photo on LinkedIn will harm you. I am a Saudi woman so I cannot use my own photo, but I have a personal logo that I use everywhere professionally. Only a few Saudi women use personal photos. Such women are attracting attention; you feel that they are courageous and willing to do anything. They are not restricted by the norms of society. They are really professional because they are not affected by external pressures.

The profile tensions around the personal photo gave Fatimah negative feelings regarding her professional opportunities as a woman when she compared herself with other Saudi women who did use a personal photo on LinkedIn. Fatimah dealt with this tension by designing a personal logo as an alternative to personal photo, as she told me in the interview: "this situation is temporary; I believe things are getting better, and I will be able to use my personal photo in the future".

The other LinkedIn feature that generated some tensions regarding presenting your identity was the LinkedIn summary (now expressed as 'About'). Most of the research participants expressed their confusion about how to describe their experience when I asked them about creating the LinkedIn summary. I believe this confusion came about because the

summary requires them to express their personal identity ‘me’, which is unusual for Saudi women, who always refer to a collective identity ‘we’. In fact, the summary was the one feature that is most likely to remain unfilled by many of my research participants. Taking Fatimah for example, she said:

> In the summary, I could not enter information about myself; it was hard to describe myself in only two or three lines. I cannot confine myself to three lines. I do not love to talk about myself. There are social and personal pressures.

She found it difficult to express herself in two or three lines; this tension arose because Saudi women are not used to talking about themselves publicly; there are personal and social pressures against expressing themselves. Like Fatimah, Douaa felt tense about writing the summary. She was not aware of the LinkedIn importance, but she explained her experience to me in two period of times:

> At the beginning, I hated LinkedIn, I felt it was a useless platform; I even shared my personal photo there, because I thought nobody was using it. My photo was with hijab in a business meeting. I knew it was a professional platform, so I used this photo; I was writing simple information. However, I did not write the summary at that time; I wrote it recently, only three months ago. The reason I wrote the summary so late was that it was hard to summarize what I have achieved. I cannot express myself in simple sentences.

The identity work tensions evident in Douaa’s experiences also reveal the difficulties that Saudi women face in expressing or talking about their achievements publicly. The analysis demonstrates the lack of experience that Saudi women have in presenting their professional selves by writing about their achievements in public. However, Douaa overcame these

tensions by writing the summary after a certain amount of time had passed and trying to adopt a positive perspective about LinkedIn through different experiences.

Hanan explained her identity work tensions from the LinkedIn summary in a way that reflected her lack of self-worth and self- knowledge:

> Nowadays, I am trying my best to gather all my skills and qualifications to create a summary. I do not think I have strong enough qualifications to write a good summary, so I am embarrassed by writing down all my characteristics. I do not know all the aspects of my personality. My profile is complete on LinkedIn, except the summary - it is not that clear- but I do not know how to present myself.

Her experience results from having been a private woman for a long time. She was not used to expressing herself and was embarrassed at describing her characteristics, but she dealt with these tensions by ignoring the summary for the time being and getting to know herself and practicing personal branding to reach her desired professional identity.

In addition, the research findings express how the participants dealt with and overcame the tensions they felt when faced with the questions that was put to them by the professional platform LinkedIn. LinkedIn required them to reveal their background. This information came to light when the participants were asked about engagement, networking, and connections. Their answers showed their struggles and how they overcame those by using different ways and perspectives.

Fatimah, who expressed her feelings of uncertainty about building her professional network, said:

> When I decided to introduce myself professionally on LinkedIn, I remembered that I did not know what to do on LinkedIn. Who should I add

> in my connections? Should they be from my field? Or should I be open to other specialties? What are the benefits of adding people on LinkedIn?

Fatimah's identity work tensions appeared as a struggle and confusion over networking; it is her first attempt to build a network in Saudi professional society. She has no experience with being women in professional society. Her approach to overcoming these tensions was by getting to know LinkedIn within the time and then build her network. However, Layla's answers conveyed considerable tensions as she considered her own actions and others' reactions of her being part of a network such as LinkedIn. She explained*:*

> I did not know what to post on LinkedIn. I was afraid of writing anything; I would write something and then delete it. It scares me when I see people reading my posts, but it encourages me when I see people interacting with them – I tell myself I should keep it up.

Layla's tensions arise from a lack of knowledge and a fear of making mistakes; she is concerned about the opinions of others and the way they will look at her engagement on LinkedIn. She dealt with these tensions by encouraging herself to continue trying to play professional roles. Shahad expresses another source of tensions in networking and connection from a co-worker, as she is the only female in her job position:

> I accept all connections from all people, except the people who work with me in the same office, the same department. Why would they follow me? Not adding them to my network gives me the chance to make updates and get the certificates and courses I need in ways that they won't imitate. I do have plans for my career; why do you want to follow me on the same career path when we are in the same office? Why should they see everything I am doing and updating? Also, I do not want to compete with them. I want to have my brand name.

Shahad's tension in her identity work involved networking and connections; she was concerned about losing the distinctiveness of her career uniqueness because she shares the same platform with male co-workers. She does not want to expose herself as a professional to people who work with her because she wants to build her career independently. With Shahad, I discovered that her gender identity has been private for a long time that made privacy essential in her style of making connections and networking. These views are revealed in her way of dealing with the tension; she set her LinkedIn profile private and became very selective in networking.

The online tensions for Saudi professional women can be divided into three main categories, each of which informs specific practices that Saudi women undertake to deal with and overcome these tensions. Additionally, each category expresses an overall conclusion for the experiences of sociocultural identity work during online personal branding. The data in Table 4.1 demonstrate the tensions, the causes of those tensions, and the ways that Saudi women deal with or overcome these tensions.

Kind of tension	Couse of tensions	Overcoming or dealing
Feature 1: Tensions from profile identification		
Knowledge	Lack of experience	Step-by-step profile identification; Learning from other Saudi women's profiles
Professional experience and qualifications	Classifications	Many attempts at adding personal experience; Design personal logo to make their profile more advanced
Accuracy and perfection	Consider other's perspectives in their identification; Avoid building high expectations	Putting themselves within the average skills classifications
Foreign style of platform and personal photo	Cultural and gendered background	Referring to the Islamic principles that they follow as a reason to deal with tensions
Negative effects of not fully completing the profile; Missing professional opportunities as women	Feeling they are different in terms of restrictions as women	Accepting the situation temporarily; Designing personal logo as an alternative to personal photo
Feature 2: Tensions from profile summary		
Self-expression in number of sentences	Social and personal pressures; Saudi women don't like talking about themselves	Ignoring the summary (left it empty)
Awareness of LinkedIn's importance; Difficulties in recognising professional achievements	Lack of experience in presenting professional self to public as women	Write the summary after a certain amount of time has passed; Try to adopt a positive perspective about LinkedIn through different experiences

Lack of self-worth and self- knowledge	Not used to expressing themselves and embarrassed at writing characteristics due to their gender identity and women's status in Saudi Arabian society	Ignoring the summary; Getting to know themselves and practicing professional identity construction
Feature 3: Tensions from engagement, networking and communication		
Confusion and struggle the first time	Lack of experience being in professional society as women	Getting to know LinkedIn within the time-and-build network
Knowledge and fear of making mistakes	Lack of experience practicing professional identity as women	Encouraging themselves by many attempts to play professional roles
Fear of losing career uniqueness	Sharing the same platform with male co-workers	Set LinkedIn profile to private and be very selective in networking

Table 4.1: LinkedIn tensions and coping mechanisms: Profile identification

LinkedIn identification generates tensions, as shown in Table 4.1. An in-depth interpretation of these tensions reflects how Saudi women adopt a collective mindset in their online personal branding practices that results in collective ways of profile identification; they look at the accounts of other Saudi women before creating their own professional identities. In building online personal branding through profile identification, Saudi women in the findings vary in balancing their needs and desires with sociocultural norms. They consider the broader community, such as the attributes of their society, before themselves in online practices. Some participants deal with the tensions in a way that makes them underestimate themselves or be less than accurate in assessing their skills and qualifications. Others manage, negotiate, and work on their identity perspectives in the face of conflicting sociocultural norms by enjoying the platform's benefits and ignoring its potential harm. In their self-branding, there is always many solutions or ways to overcome identity work tensions. If they cannot find one, they delay completing their profile until they have found it.

In their online appearance and engagement, participants always gain strength from other Saudi women by comparing their profiles, learning from one another, and motivating themselves by seeing the successful experience of the full profiles of others. In their tensions over writing summaries, they face the facts of women not being public in Saudi Arabia, where women usually do not talk about themselves and where professional women need to work hard on their identities. The summary request is often the first time Saudi women have had to think about who they are in a public context. It is the first time they become aware of the importance of answering the question, 'Who am I?' Saudi women were not aware of the challenge of forming a professional identity until they faced it; when they struggle, they find ways to deal with it. They admitted the importance of creating a LinkedIn summary in interesting, direct, and simple ways. In fact, the summary acts like an 'Aha! Moment' for many Saudi women and encouraged them to explore their professional selves and get to know themselves through their identity work experiences of online personal branding. It is also the first time they must navigate their professional selves in consideration of sociocultural norms through multiple attempts at identification practices. The tensions of engagement, networking and connections are practices of professional existence that contain learning processes and exploring practices to help create personal brands. Saudi women have ways of motivating themselves, regardless of social, cultural and gender tensions, by focusing on the positive reactions they receive from their engagement and networking. Being professional women puts pressure on them to keep their efforts and achievements private to avoid male colleagues in the same office.

Sociocultural tensions

Being on a platform to achieve professional goals has become critical for the research participants. This can be seen in their identity work, as described in previous sections. However, the experiences of branding Saudi women in professional networks are shaped by

their backgrounds, which causes sociocultural tensions. The analysis in this section considers the tensions that under-studied women experience because of the women's cultural, social, and gender background which express their feelings and thoughts and the rules that they live by in real life.

The tensions are varied; on the one hand, there are tensions that women feel but have no impact on their personal branding practices because of the professional nature of the platform. On the other, there are tensions that are front and centre in the minds of women and direct their identity work through personal branding practices and their overall consideration of professional identity construction experiences.

The sociocultural tensions involve norms that fall into two categories: tensions from being Saudi women in the way that participants perceive themselves in their identity work and tensions from the way that Saudi women are perceived by others. The sociocultural rules that direct the identity work of participants act like roots that generate tensions in the online context. However, the experiences of dealing with or overcoming LinkedIn tensions are an opportunity for the women to work on their professional identities through different situations and keep trying until they get to know who they are as professionals and the best ways to build personal brands. From an experience of overcoming online tensions of being Saudi women, it is interesting to find that some of Saudi women in this research deal with Saudi men differently than men of other nationalities. Tensions in networking and connecting with men are due to the kinds of Saudi men they deal with. They avoid being misjudged and misunderstood by Saudi men. As one of Saudi professional women using LinkedIn, Reema explained these tensions as follows:

> One of the problems that I faced on LinkedIn is adding the friends of my brothers. When I receive a request from one of them, I am confused as to

> whether to accept or decline. I get embarrassed because he knows my brothers. Saudi culture contributes to this attitude and they might misunderstand my action. I would accept this guy if he were from another country; in that case, he would not judge me, because LinkedIn is a professional platform.

Further, Hanna expressed the sociocultural tensions by reflecting on her culture, society, and women's status:

> In order to have a complete profile, you have to make your profile public, while our culture affords privacy to women; that is not a weak point but a mismatch. That is contrary to my personality; I love having a private life. I consider LinkedIn a platform to prove myself. I heard about LinkedIn, that it is open; one of its disadvantages that it is too open! There is no privacy there. I noticed that many people – with whom I do not have relationships in real life – and my husband's friends are congratulating me, liking my posts, and reading my CV. That was kind of embarrassing to me, because I am a humble person, yet I decided to overlook this in order to succeed and achieve my goals. My goals on LinkedIn were to find a job or make a contribution.

However, given LinkedIn's professional nature, it opens the door to Saudi women to deal with or relax sociocultural tensions and create a professional identity. The tensions also show the importance of the accounts of other Saudi women, which play a vital role in helping Saudi women who are experiencing tensions to overcome the sociocultural norms that cause those tensions.

On the other hand, there are tensions from the women's actions and behaviours in the way others perceived them. The way that Saudi women look at the platform and feel tension is an extension of their status, as women, in Saudi Arabian society. Saudi women in this research always feel that they are being watched in society, so they always seek perfection, sometimes so intensely that it could prevent them from constructing a professional identity, as when they

create a profile but ignore the profile's identification requirements. Saudi women deal with tensions regarding how others perceive them differently. As an illustration of Stereotyping, Reema states:

> I do not cover my face and I can put my personal photo on LinkedIn, but I do not want to because our society is still stereotyping women who post personal photos, and I do not want to become embroiled in such conflicts. For example, people classify women who share their personal photos as showing off their beauty to achieve personal goals. I am afraid to be misjudged; I might post my photo when I am too old (*من القواعد من النساء*) and no longer beautiful.

Also, Nadiah explained why she felt tense about adding a profile photo by saying:

> I feel like people are visualising; the photo is the first thing they are looking at! When my personal photo was public for everybody, my connection numbers were larger, especially among men, but the photo was not useful in getting a job! People were viewing my photo as just a photo of Saudi women.

Personal branding practices of participants depend on three main perspectives: their level of association with sociocultural norms, their level of conservativism and their professional purposes for being on LinkedIn. Saudi women's ways of overcoming the tensions serve as evidence that they test, motivate, and discover themselves through their identity work of online personal branding on LinkedIn. Societal expectations and sociocultural norms come first in personal branding practices, even before their preferences. Even the women who are open-minded and can build a personal brand in their preferred manner consider the expectations of society and sociocultural norms to avoid being misjudged, monitored, and stereotyped in public, as Douaa explained:

> I am not sharing my personal photo; I deleted it when I started adding connections. When I first signed up on LinkedIn, when I was a university

> student, I felt that people would judge me for sharing my personal photo. There were close-minded people around me; I know that I should be stronger than this. I removed it. I became a little bit conservative; I do not have to share my personal photo.

Saudi women who are more involved in the experiences of professional identity work, networking, and connections on LinkedIn are more willing to deal with tensions and restrictions in ways that ensure they will benefit from their online presence. All participants seek societal acceptance and recognition when branding themselves online. The analysis of identity work identifies the most common tensions that impact online personal branding, their causes, and the women's ways of dealing with or overcoming these tensions, see Table 4.2.

Kind of tension	Couse of tensions	Overcome or dealing
Catageory1: Tensions from being Saudi women (self-perceptions)		
Shyness, confusion and misjudging	Gender segregation; Considering family reputation; Being misunderstood; Sociocultural norms; Not used to taking the lead in making connections as women	Avoiding being judged as women; Questioning the situation and forming a clear perspective; Looking at other Saudi women's accounts;
Perfection of professionalism	Feeling of underqualification; Fear of making mistakes; Underestimating themselves	Managing engagement and participation
Catageory2: Tensions from their actions and behaviours (the way they are perceived by others)		
Privacy	Gender segregation and women as private objects; The notion of ideal Islamic women	Overlook tensions; Adopt a new perspective due to professionalism
Stereotyping	Society's perspectives on women who are open-minded; The notion of ideal Islamic women	Exclude themselves from actions that may lead to stereotyping; Form a mindset and stick to it
Surveillance	Fear of misjudgement, society as close-minded; Avoiding being visualised through first impression of personal photo. Status of Saudi women	Avoiding misjudgement due to surveillance by managing appearance and setting the profile to private rather than public

Table 4.2: LinkedIn tensions and coping mechanisms: Perceptions and actions

Since Saudi women live in a collectivist, conservative culture, this background impacts their perspectives on life. In their identity work through online personal branding on LinkedIn, they experience sociocultural tensions in profile identification, engagements, networking, and

connections. Their identity work through online personal branding is shaped by their ways of dealing with sociocultural tensions, which reflect feelings like shyness, confusion, hesitation, and stress that women try to avoid in branding themselves. Privacy, stereotyping, and surveillance are the three main sociocultural norms that women consider in their online identity work. Being in a professional network without experience in self-presentation, self-exposure, professional engagement, and networking puts Saudi women face to face with tensions and requires them to find ways to build personal brands that will serve their professional goals and manifest their intentions of being on a professional platform.

Analysing the impact of cultural, social, and gendered background on online identity work

The cultural, social, and gendered background shape identity work for Saudi professional women by generating specific factors that impact online engagement, profile identification, networking, and connections on their LinkedIn accounts. Since Saudi women came from a collectivist, conservative and masculine society, their identity work is distinguished by their specific sociocultural background and status in Saudi Arabian society. This section identifies three main factors that play a role in identity negotiation and management in the identity work of Saudi professional women on LinkedIn. It expresses the way in which their identity work on online engagement, profile identification, networking and connections is affected by these three factors: The impact of sociocultural rules, the domination of guardianship, and the impact of 'being Saudi women' and 'ideal femininity' (Doumato, 1992).

The experiences of Saudi women on LinkedIn for personal branding purposes show their methods of identity negotiation and management when building personal brands. When

Saudi women use LinkedIn as a professional platform and with their feeling of culture shock online, they become confused about their online presence, their wants and needs and their cultural, social, and gendered expectations. Saudi women in this research are not sure what they should do and what they should avoid remaining within their sociocultural norms online by practicing a form of identity management in their use of LinkedIn. With consideration of who they are and where they come from, participants negotiate and manage their identity online through what they do not want to convey about themselves, referring to the identity work concept "identity not!" (Freitas et al., 1997, p. 324).

The impact of sociocultural rules

Due to the attributes of Saudi Arabian society, sociocultural rules are characteristics that affect individuals throughout the country; they follow and consider them in their everyday lives. Saudi Arabian society is conservative, with strong values and norms. It is a collectivist culture in which people always consider society before the individual when making decisions (Le Renard, 2008). The popularly understood attributes of Saudi Arabian society are that it is conservative and masculine (AlMunajjed, 1997; Doumato, 1992; Le Renard, 2008). Saudi women are considered private objects which are not for public view; this is a result of the long-standing gender segregation in Saudi Arabian society. If women want to appear in public, they use veiling (AlMunajjed, 1997; Lipsky, 1959; Quamar, 2016). The major impact of women's cultural, social, and gendered backgrounds through their online personal branding on LinkedIn appeared through studying their identity work. The clear impact that shape identity work online involves the women's identity narrative and performance in expressing who they are and whom they want to become online through LinkedIn. Sociocultural rules shape their way of identity construction on professional platform and results in specific tensions and practices of identity work during online personal branding that are discussed in the following sections. Professional

identity construction on LinkedIn is identified through the engagement of women, profile identification, networking, and connections by analysing the critical sociocultural rules that impact identity work and by examining how sociocultural rules shape and appear in online personal branding practices on LinkedIn.

Sociocultural rules are the first factor that reveals the nature of the identity work of Saudi professional women. Research findings show how Saudi professional women build online personal brands with due consideration of sociocultural rules but also elicit positive impressions of their online appearance and give them the benefits of an online existence. This research indicates ways in which sociocultural rules impact identity work of Saudi women using LinkedIn by two main characteristics, starting with veiling, that affects profile identification, especially the visual identity, and gender segregation; considering women to be private objects affects profile identification, online engagement, networking, and connections.

The impact of sociocultural rules is critical as it puts women in confusing situations in their identity work, which may end in the failure of professional identity construction or an online persona that is not genuine. Being on a professional social media platform such as LinkedIn for the purpose of personal branding requires fully identifying oneself, engagement and networking (Dijck, 2013). However, the lifestyle that Saudi women grow up with and live in a collectivist, conservative and masculine culture and society represents distinct experiences that explain their identity work actions and reactions. On the one hand, having a LinkedIn account as a professional is a personal choice; on the other, their experiences on LinkedIn are shaped by their sociocultural rules. Participants do not want to be different from other Saudi women or have their online behaviour misjudged by others. Therefore, between their preferences and the platform's required actions, there are always rules that steer the women's identity work and online personal branding practices. Saudi women experience identity work

in many aspects of using LinkedIn, whether in their profile identification, engagement, or networking. There are many situations that Saudi women experience for the first time due to the nature of LinkedIn, which is open, features a gender mix and requires accurate information from users if they are to reap its benefits.

In analysing the impact of sociocultural rules on Saudi women's identity work on LinkedIn, rules appear in several ways and cause tensions and contribute to personal branding practices. Although Saudi women share the same sociocultural rules, the impact of those rules differs depending on many aspects. For instance, the level of conservativism of the woman and where she lives, the mindset of the women and the women's response to the impact. All these aspects exist in the data, which show both the women's attitudes to building online personal brands and their perceptions about their personal identities 'me', which are private; social identity and professional identity form a collective identity work that is directed by the dialogue that women conduct between themselves and the sociocultural rules that govern life in Saudi Arabia. Participants use LinkedIn to create a professional persona by completing their profile but looking at themselves makes them question what – and what not – to write, which profile photo to upload and what kind of network to form. All these questions participate in identity work and determine how a personal brand could end up looking.

Research data shows that Saudi women's identity work during online personal branding is an extension of two sociocultural rules. The first involves veiling practices, whether the women cover their face or not and can or cannot use their personal photo online, and the second is gender segregation, whether women and their families are conservative or open-minded. These rules impact these women's online presence and participation and put them in confusing situations in their online identity work. Extracts below provide examples of women experiencing the impact of the veiling and gender segregation sociocultural rules in their

identity work doing online personal branding on LinkedIn, especially as to visual identity, profile photo and network formation and connections. For instance, Khawlah, who is not using a veil to cover her face and had placed her photo online at first, about her being identified online, explains her experience of having had to remove her photo eventually due to the reactions of others.

> I started to identify my profile; I learned from the senior professional people on LinkedIn. Then I searched for Saudi women on LinkedIn and saw how they were dealing with the profile photo. I decided to add a professional photo of me; I kept it for five months, then I removed it when I saw the reaction of Saudi people to my personal photo. When I am stuck in a confusing situation in which I will be misunderstood, I retreat immediately. We are raised on these norms in Saudi Arabia; my reputation is the most important thing.

In addition, Hanan, who refutes the belief of Saudi Arabian society that personal photos of women should never appear online, explained that she removed her personal photo, not because of what others think, but because she wanted to appear more professional (and add a professional photo of herself). She stated:

> Saudi Arabian society refuses the idea of sharing women's personal photos, but I accept it. I shared my personal photo for a while and then removed it. It was not professional enough. At that time, I did not have many contacts on LinkedIn.

As for the women, the experiences of completing LinkedIn profiles and using personal photos vary depending on their overall self-dialogue, their consideration of sociocultural rules and appearance experience of other Saudi professional women on LinkedIn. However, the impact of the veiling in Saudi Arabian society steers identity work and online personal branding. Saudi women deal with sociocultural rules differently, as is shown in the examples above. My

discussion with the research participants about using their personal photos as a visual identity on LinkedIn revealed some interesting insights. Some women were open to taking individualised actions and were open-minded women who took the lead. Others, meanwhile, choose to adopt the cultural rules as their own beliefs and personal attitudes in their identity work to form their personal brands, and they are more likely to be conservative women in society. How can a personal photo be an extension of veiling practices? The answer was revealed by the findings of this research and shows that Saudi women give serious consideration to what society may say or what is really said about women using their personal photo on social media platforms. However, it is also notable that women are willing to try to go outside the sociocultural rules because LinkedIn is a professional platform, so they use their photos for that purpose as in Dalal, experiences:

> In the past, I refused to post my personal photo online because of Saudi Arabian society, but I am now ready to post it, because I am following my friends' approaches, and they share their personal photos. So, I think I will do it; I used to fear being called 'odd' or 'coming up with new, weird ideas'; because of that, I have never posted my photo, and I am still afraid of using a personal photo.

Moreover, in discussing the impact of gender segregation on identity work during online personal branding on LinkedIn, participants demonstrate how this social rule affects their identity work in completing their profile, networking, and connections. The experiences reflect struggles, self-doubt, and mixed feelings of women about being on LinkedIn, especially as a professional platform, because of the presence of men. When Hanan was asked about her identity work on LinkedIn, she clearly expressed the impact of gender segregation by saying:

> As a Saudi woman who adheres to her the norms of society, LinkedIn is new, or maybe we are not accustomed to a culture with a gender-mixing life, *Ekhtelat*, (gender mixing) where men and women can communicate easily

> with one another. The LinkedIn experience is a little bit strange for us, because it is a professional platform for jobs. So, it is strange to put our personal information online. We used to introduce ourselves offline in real life and in women's communities. This world is new for us.

Jawaher provided an example of how Saudi women are impacted by gender segregation. Regarding her profile identification on LinkedIn, she acted with the belief 'the less said, the better':

> I did not fully introduce myself; I uploaded my CV. Until now I have not edited my name; those who are interested in knowing me can check my CV. I believe LinkedIn is professional and has nothing to do with who you are; they only need to know the gender, the location and the qualifications. I wrote my first name, female, location, and interests, uploaded my CV for those who needed it and added my email for communication, not my phone number. The less said, the better.

Similarly, Ghala's experiences regarding networking and accepting connection requests from men generated tensions:

> Networking and connection requests from men are a problem for me. I feel tension, but I do not respond to them, because I always do what makes me comfortable; I do not appeal to society's norms. When I was sending a connection request to a man or following a man, I first asked myself, Is it ok? What would people say about my following men on my LinkedIn account? Even if this account is professional. This happens because of the norms in Saudi Arabian society. If I were in the United States, I would not mind adding men. It differs from one society to another.

In contrast, Hala explained her experience by stating her openness to deal with men in professional contexts. However, she simultaneously placed the responsibility of setting

communication boundaries on herself to avoid any misunderstandings, as some men are not well versed with the art of communicating with women:

> I build my network carefully; I sometimes decline certain connections. I do not have a problem with adding both men and women, yet there is a kind of man who wants to start a conversation with me; such men use LinkedIn as a platform for chatting. Saudi women should be serious, or else they will be misunderstood. We must determine our own way and set the boundaries, not only on LinkedIn but also in daily life.

The data shows that the online self-exposure and presentation of women depend on the nature of LinkedIn and sociocultural rules. The participants' many ways of branding themselves are associated with the social rules of Saudi Arabia and the women's awareness of the importance of the impression they can make with their appearance. These attitudes required constructing and reconstructing their identities in suitable ways. In profile identification, networking, and connections, the women in this research worry about being in public and question the appropriate ways of communicating and appearing in a mixed-gender environment, LinkedIn. This situation creates a conflict between how they want to appear and what is an appropriate way to appear to have a professional identity. Some feel the tension and are aware of being in public but still follow their preferences of online personal branding. Others deal with the platform the way they operate in real life by limiting their online appearance: not writing their full name and being cautious about engagement and networking.

Both veiling and gender segregation reveal the impact of sociocultural rules on Saudi women's online personal branding and show how Saudi women negotiate, manage and work on their professional identity. They do their identity work while considering their sociocultural background in many ways. First, the women choose to undertake professional identity construction by mystification practices (Goffman, 1990). They do not identify themselves in

the standard. Instead, they write just the first name and do not include a personal photo when relaying information on qualifications and their careers. Second, some women manage their appearance by considering the 'objectification' process in their self-exposure, their presentation as Muslim women, and as believers by answering three questions in their minds to assess identification practices: "What is my religion? Why is it important to my life? And how do my beliefs guide my behaviour?" (Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013, p. 413).

Furthermore, some women aim to form a positive self-identity (Chen, 2013) by constructing and reconstructing a professional identity in ways that suit their preferences and still accord with sociocultural rules. They brand themselves by considering their inner selves and navigating the key attributes of their personalities to overcome sociocultural tensions and form 'unique value propositions' (Morgan, 2011) to have professional identities. The value proposition is a personal branding practice that consists of three components: excellence skills, soft skills, and self-awareness (Morgan, 2011). Participants do identity work using interaction order practices (Goffman, 1983) to manage their professional identities: "the workings of the interaction order can easily be viewed as the consequences of systems of enabling conventions, in the sense of the ground rules for a game" (p. 6). By considering the expectations of their audience, which are governed by sociocultural rules, Saudi women try to update their LinkedIn profiles as their careers progress. With each new job, they experience people interacting with and examining their online appearance. Therefore, women who use LinkedIn in many ways negotiate, manage, and work on their professional identities through different practices. Thus, they can overcome the online culture shock and adopt a new approach that relieves the impact of sociocultural rules online and could open the door to dramatic changes in the overall professional identity construction of Saudi women.

Guardianship is the second major factor that shapes identity work for Saudi women during online personal branding on LinkedIn. The analysis in next section considers the ways in which guardianship dominates Saudi women's LinkedIn identity work by considering how this factor steers women's identity negotiation, management, and work.

The domination of guardianship

As a result of living in Saudi Arabian's conservative and masculine society, guardianship dominates women's identity work during online personal branding on LinkedIn. This domination appears not just in their personal branding practices but also in their feelings about and perceptions of having an online presence. Identity work through online personal branding for Saudi women is collective because participants consider their guardians in their online personal branding practices. Another consideration of identity work for Saudi women is the impact of family culture, which varies by levels of conservatism and masculinity. The experiences of Saudi women in building online personal brands under the domination of guardianship reveal a form of confusion that generates specific attitudes about and reactions to profile identification, engagement, networking, and connections. Analysing identity work through online personal branding in relation to guardianship domination will involve two levels of guardianship: immediate guardianship, which involves male guardians such as fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, and uncles, and extended guardianship such as familial male guardians that are more distantly related. Both levels of guardianship dominate the online personal branding of Saudi women in ways that are reflected in their online identity work. With immediate guardians, the impact is varied because women consider their fathers, husbands, or brothers in their profile identification, especially as to visual identity, engagement, networking, and connections. The impact of extended guardians appears in profile identification such as using a first name and visual identity or personal photo.

Immediate guardian

Analysing identity work of Saudi women during online personal branding in relation to the domination of guardianship, shows a particular form of agency that involves practicing "agency maneuvers" (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019, p. 136). This form of agency considers the cultural, social, and gendered background of Saudi women in profile identification, engagement, networking, and communications. Saudi women are influenced by their background in ways that benefit both the women and the sociocultural and gendered rules in which the women were raised. Even though Saudi women need to be online to construct a professional identity, the data shows the participants specific type of identity negotiation and management. Saudi women practice identity work in relation to immediate guardian domination as a strategy they develop through their use of LinkedIn.

Performance cannot be created from the beginning, and situations cannot be understood as a one-time experience. The experiences of identity work of Saudi women through online personal branding considering the immediate guardian as an extension to their real-life experiences of male domination. By that, this study reveals that women whose lifestyles are dominated by conservative guardians in real life consider this domination in their LinkedIn identity work doing online personal branding. Participants' approach to profile identification, networking, and connections take place with reference in their minds to what their guardians may think and prefer. Some participants admitted that they discussed their online experiences with their guardians to avoid any misunderstanding and thus, seek affirmation of their identity performance. Some revealed that they had been forced to change their preferred appearance because of their immediate guardian, while other participants were challenged due to differences between their parents, one conservative and the other open-minded. The extracts below offer examples of identity work during online personal branding for Saudi women being

dominated by their immediate guardians in networking, connections, and visual identity. The excerpts show a situation of domination and a situation of identity negotiation, management, and work. As a woman and researcher from Saudi Arabia, I share the experiences of the women, who reflect, explain, and in some cases complain.

Hanna explained her experiences and the impact of her networking and making connections on her identity work. These experiences reflect the domination imposed by her guardian:

> I noticed that the friends of my husband were visiting my profile too, and I asked my husband if that bothered him or not. He said, “No, as long as you are writing professional content, I am fine with it; you have signed up for LinkedIn to look for a job and try to improve yourself, so there is no problem”. I remember that I was asking my husband about everything that I encountered on LinkedIn. For example, when his friends were checking my profile, was that useful or harmful?

Fatimah’s identity formation and engagement on LinkedIn was unconscious until I interviewed her. As she told me after we finished the interview: “Thanks, Aayad you encouraged me to think and questioning myself like I have not ever done before”. From my view as a researcher, I felt that from her interview she was shocked many times. She asked me to repeat the question, she kept telling me “I was not aware, I do not know why I identify myself in this way”. She explained further:

> At that time, I was not aware of my behaviour, I was considering the preferences of my husband in my engagement and networking. It was kind of respecting his feelings. You know, I should have reflected on my behaviour. My account was private; I honestly do not know why I made it private, maybe because of my husband. I remember, when I was new on LinkedIn, one of my husband's friends sent me a connection request. I was

> afraid to accept him; I thought it might bother my husband because he is conservative. After a year, I accepted the request as I realised that I have the right to do whatever I want! Nobody has an influence on me. My husband's friend sent me a request because LinkedIn is a professional platform, not because he wants me to be his friend.

Visual identity, particularly in the form of a personal photo, is another online personal branding practice that is affected by guardianship. It impacts the identity work of women, Fatimah stated:

> I cannot show myself online. Society rejects it, especially the close males (my husband, my father, my brothers), yet I am thinking about it in the future. What distinguishes Saudi women is that they do not share their personal photos.

However, identifying the professional self and engagement for the women in LinkedIn can also differ by the level of acceptance of the domination of guardianship in forming online personal brand, the level of awareness of the difficulties, and the restrictions that could shape the usage on the LinkedIn platform. These restrictions have been put from women regarding their mindset or from their families. This could be shown in the case of Layla, who was unsatisfied with the domination of her guardian. Layal is an example of young Saudi professional women who plan for their professional life starting from building identity to have personal brand, exceeding some difficulties in the beginning, ending with having their online reputation with fully identified LinkedIn account. When someone looks at her online appearance on LinkedIn, it is obvious to see a confident, Saudi professional female who really cares about her personal image and reputation. Layla is knowledgeable, active, and there with a clear vision. Someone would not expect that she has been affected by her guardian in identifying herself. However, during our discussion of being on LinkedIn, she admitted that it is not easy to be online as one of Saudi professional women. In her experience of identifying

LinkedIn profile Layla was forced by her brother to remove the profile photo. This domination of guardianship has affected her identity work as she explained:

> The biggest challenge I faced on LinkedIn was the ability to use my personal photo; I did it earlier, but I had to remove it because my brother refused to have it up. Posting my photo with hijab is fine with me, but my society refuses. Then I had to use a photo of a personal logo. I wish I could upload my personal photo, because this photo represents me, and I feel that my profile is not complete. The personal photo helps to build up my personal brand; people would know me from this photo. A real photo gives you a sense of reality. Now, I am thinking about reusing my personal photo, but my brother is preventing me. I am upset about removing the photo. But yes! I challenged society by creating an account on LinkedIn, so I am moving forward step by step; I am mature enough and I know what I want. I am doing everything without asking anybody, yet I cannot make my own decision regarding the personal photo, and that has affected my account.

Through these experiences, Saudi women consider their collective identity in their identity work to avoid practices that could affect their positive relationships with their families or male guardians while branding themselves in ways that suit their professional needs and goals. Through branding themselves, Saudi women look critically at the platform to gain its benefits and address any difficulties that they face in distinguishing themselves. Furthermore, identity work is performed to overcome any uncomfortable feelings in relation to a guardian. Saudi women are aware of the importance of LinkedIn as a professional platform, accepting their realities and experiences. For some of them with clear intentions to change, women continuously undertake profile construction and reconstruction. The level of acceptance of the domination by the guardian differs depending on the relationship with the guardian. For example, participants who are dominated by brothers show a level of anger, but Saudi women more accept fathers and husbands. As a result of the stress and discomfort caused by guardian

domination, Saudi women build personal brands step by step to produce satisfactory professional personas, considering both their families and guardians and, at the same time, their own preferences.

Extended Guardian

The other type of guardianship domination is extended family domination. My study distinguishes between immediate and extended guardian domination because it is important to differentiate between their effects and attitudes. In the immediate guardian context, women really care about the guardian and try to avoid conflict, whereas, in extended guardianship, women are trying to avoid the gaze and surveillance and protect the reputation of their immediate family. Participants avoid certain forms of appearance in their profile identification, engagement networking, and connections to shield the family honour and not bring shame to their families. Women who face this kind of experience are most likely open-minded, and their immediate families do not associate with their extended family conservatism (Le Renard, 2014)

The extracts below explain the experiences of identity work of women through building online personal branding and the domination of extended guardians over their profile identification, such as full name and visual identity. Women who are dominated in their personal branding practices by guardianship because of their extended family as they want to avoid the conflict between the families or avoiding any possibilities to give the chance to let the extended family talked about their small family. This situation occurred when women came from an extended conservative family, yet the family (father and mother) these women were born into were open-minded. However, the identity work will also be affected by the domination of the extended family roles. Thus, the women from the open-minded Immediate family are careful about their online behavior and appearance because they want to prevent their small family from being judged or bothered by the extended family.

Starting with Douaa, who has very interesting experience in identifying herself online, she is an employee who does not cover her face in everyday life, and she can put her photo online. She stated that when she opened her LinkedIn profile, Douaa put her photo, then removed it. The domination of guardianship has affected her online appearance on a professional platform as she used her first name to avoid being known by a relative. She called herself on social media, “Her name is Douaa”. However, she enrolled her full name in LinkedIn when she realised the importance of it, resulting in a job offer after full identification of her LinkedIn account:

> In order to have peace of mind, you have to do whatever you want, but you try your best to keep your news from your extended family members who are living with a different mindset; even my name on all my accounts is not Doua’a Saleh. It is “Her name is Doua’a”, and I do not share my personal photo on LinkedIn for the same reason. No matter what! I felt that I must be unidentified. There are only a few people whom I have allowed to know who I am. I started to think about why sharing my full name on social media bothers me. Then, I realised writing my full name would bother my father and my family, not only me! I am not representing only myself but my entire family with all its branches in the east and south. People do not judge me individually; they involve my family. I love my father and do not want him to be bothered. I am representing myself; that is why I wrote only Doua’a.

On the other hand, Nadiah, the clinical dietitian who also has very interesting identity work experiences of LinkedIn ending with a private account after trying to be seen by every professional. Nadiah, from the group of Saudi women who does not cover their face in real life and can put their personal photo on social media platforms. When she started on LinkedIn her account was open and she put her personal photo for the public as a visual identity. However, the domination of guardianship was the direction of her online personal branding practices. She had a concern about putting her personal photo on LinkedIn same as Douaa, because of

her extended family. As a result of this concern, she did not remove her personal photo from the account, but she set a private account to control the views of her profile, especially her personal photo. As she believes in the importance of the visual identity, and it is part of the whale profile identification:

> I never associated myself with Saudi culture; for example, as to the profile photo, I use my personal photo on LinkedIn. It was available for everyone to see initially, but now only my connections can see my photo. I do not want anyone from my extended family to bother me or my father. Also, what benefits will they get if they see my personal photo if I am not going to have them as contacts? I am not here to make friends; I come here to create a professional network. The only challenge I face on LinkedIn is the personal photo. In our culture, they are afraid of showing faces of women.

The third example of the domination of guardianship with the consideration of extending family is Shahad. The preference of Shahad in putting her personal photo online was different from Douaa and Nadiah. Before the quotes of Shahad's interview is discussed, it is vital to pay attention to the way Shahad adopts her beliefs about the importance of personal photo and how she convinced herself about the benefits that she gained at her job from not putting her personal photo online:

> I do not use any photo on LinkedIn; LinkedIn has sent me notifications many times saying "upload your photo, upgrade your profile", but I simply cannot because of my culture. I do not cover my face, but I cannot upload my personal photo online because my extended family and friends will judge me. My immediate family might agree to my sharing my personal photo, but I have not discussed it with them. I do not want myself to turn into a story that people talk about and discuss; they might speak badly about my immediate family and me. That is why I am not sharing my personal photo; it is not shameful at all. The other point that I won't use a photo of nature is because

> I do believe that I am prettier than a flower; I am a person. I do not think the personal photo is important.

The level of acceptance that Shahad experienced in considering her extended family culture in her attitudes and understanding of not putting her personal photo is unique. Although she opens the possibility and the ability to put her personal photo in very individual thinking, she kept finding reasons that approve the suitability of her decision of not to put it. She does not want to be judged or being a hero of the stories, that people will talk about her as a member from a conservative family putting her personal photo online.

The impact of extended guardians in shaping the online appearance of women is clear. Such impact stresses participants to think of their preferences in branding themselves while simultaneously thinking of their fathers or immediate families, whom they do not want to hurt through their identity work on LinkedIn. Women are aware of the responsibility of Saudi women to protect the reputation of the entire family (Le Renard, 2014). In identity work through online personal branding participants avoid any behaviour that makes their extended families talk negatively about their immediate families. This situation can develop if women come from a conservative extended family; in this situation, even if the immediate family is open-minded, women will still be affected by the extended family's sociocultural views, and this is simply part of the Saudi Arabian culture. Most of the participants who experienced the domination of the extended family do not cover their faces and can put their photos online, but they make tactical decisions to manage their wants and remain suitable for their families. In their identity work, participants were not angry and did not complain about their family conditions; they made their decisions out of love. As women admire their fathers as members of conservative families, and this feeling shaped their identity work to their methods of profile identification, engagement, and networking. They prefer to balance how they want to appear professionally and what could lower the domination of extended guardians in Saudi Arabian

society. With this experience, women become selective in their personal branding practices to carefully shape their online professional identity.

Through identity work, Saudi women perform a "mutually co-constructive interaction" (Beech, 2011, p. 285) between the women themselves and the sociocultural structure in which they live. In the interplay between self-identity of women 'who they are' and their social identity 'where they are from', co-construction is enacted (Watson, 2008). In building online personal brands on LinkedIn while giving due consideration to guardianship, Saudi women's experiences fall between two constructions of identity: their online professional identity on LinkedIn and their collective identity. The construction and reconstruction of professional identity for Saudi women consist of a dialogue that explains how their external, social identity influences their inner self-identity (Watson, 2009). The identity work of Saudi women is done within the framework of their history, social structure, and Saudi culture (Watson, 2009). They report many anecdotes about their identity work experiences that involve being attentive to both the internal and external aspects of identity making (Watson, 2009). Saudi women practice what Beech (2011) calls liminal identity work. With consideration of the dialogic of professional identity construction, they carry out liminal practices: experimentation by trying out versions of themselves, reflection by questioning the self in the situations that are changing and recognition by reacting within the identity that is projected. According to Beech (2011):

> ..liminality in identity work can be constituted by one or more of these practices: experimentation, in which the liminar constructs and projects an identity; reflection, in which the liminar considers the views of others and questions the self; and recognition, in which the liminar reacts to an identity that is projected onto them (p. 290).

This concept of identity work explains the online personal branding of Saudi women under both immediate and extended guardianship domination by providing helpful ways of

concentrating on the in-between stage of reconstructing their identities by offering them various practices of experimenting, reflecting, and recognising while considering the dialogic construction orientation between Saudi women, the domination of guardianship and LinkedIn.

After analysing two factors of sociocultural rules and guardianship above, the next section explains the third and final factor that affects the identity work of Saudi women when forming a professional identity on LinkedIn. In this section, I discuss how being Saudi women shape the identity work during online personal branding.

The impact of 'being Saudi women' and 'ideal femininity'

The gender identity of Saudi women is associated with the ideology of Muslim women. The idea of the ideal Saudi women is a symbol that is meant to define the unique national identity of Saudi Arabia (Doumato, 1992). This ideal meaning includes behaviour of women: actions and reactions in public, personal characteristics, and the sociocultural rules that are related to women, such as gender segregation and veiling practices. Therefore, this meaning participates in forming ideal femininity that women consider and sometimes criticise or challenge in their professional identity construction. Identity work of Saudi women during online personal branding on LinkedIn reflect their practices of negotiating, managing, and working on their professional identity. There are two important points to be considered in these practices: first, being Saudi women has various meanings, and women play many identity roles that can cause confusion and even struggle in branding themselves online. This is because Saudi women represent in their identity roles their national, cultural, social, and familial identities; yet, when they consider personal identity, which is private, they experience tension and confusion. Second, the ideal femininity for Saudi women, in most cases, acts like a frame that women consider in their minds during online personal branding. For example, sometimes they undertake or avoid specific practices because of ideal femininity; they do not want to be

out of step with this image of the ideal Islamic woman. Therefore, ideal femininity is a critical factor that steers the identity work of Saudi women on LinkedIn.

In Saudi women's identity work, ideal femininity is a key factor in guiding their online personal branding. The impact of 'ideal femininity' appears in various situations and narratives: first, the situation of appearing as Saudi women considering national identity; the narrative of women's characteristics, personality and facial features; and, finally, the narrative of 'being Saudi women' in comparison to men. Identity work through online personal branding of the research participants reflect the meaning of 'we' as Saudi women. The analysis begins with online appearance, go on to include how 'being Saudi women' affects identity work through online personal branding, and finally guide the process of profile identification, engagement, and networking. The research findings show the different forms that impact the identity work of Saudi women on LinkedIn. For instance, being Saudi women who is required to be conservative and consider the roots of Islam in their identity work online, reflecting the capability of Saudi women, correcting the negative image of Saudi women in the media and showing Saudi women as a national symbol. The extracts present several experiences where 'being Saudi women' appears as a first form in identity work of Saudi women. Jawaher says about her identity work as one of the Saudi women:

> I tried to show 'this is the Saudi woman'; since 2000 I have been working, and these are my achievements, but we are new to social media. I am still working on my LinkedIn profile; my LinkedIn account is not formed yet! LinkedIn is a window through which I saw people. Everyone has his or her own beliefs and principles on LinkedIn, so it is good for all of us to be open-minded! We need to think about our current situation as Muslim Saudi women and our future plans without ignoring our roots of being Muslim, as that determines our future.

Badreah expressed a strong sense of 'we' in her identity work by stating:

> On LinkedIn, we as Saudi women reflect our Saudi identity, because it is open to everyone. So, I am indeed reflecting my community: not only the Qassimi community but also the entire Saudi community. Then the entire world will know about our achievements; they won't say she is from Qassim but rather from Saudi Arabia. Sometimes we see Saudi women on social media who do not represent us at all.

The identity work through online personal branding for Saudi women is collective. Participants show how the image of Saudi women really matters to their public self-representation. In addition, they show how Saudi women are aware of the differences on the platform, a mixed place compared to real life which is segregated and present their intentions to show who they are as Saudi women. Their identity work and consideration of ideal femininity stress the importance of showing an appropriate image of Saudi women while also admitting that they are different from other women (Szilagyi, 2015). On LinkedIn, women explain the struggle they face when they identify their profiles due to the Saudi femininity. Participants stressed that Saudi women are different and must make greater efforts to brand themselves in LinkedIn because of their consideration of collective identity in their online identity work. Research findings explain how Saudi women branding themselves and are responsible for reflecting their real professional selves while considering ideal femininity at the same time in their identity work. Saudi women are closely connected to the image of the ideal Islamic woman, which forces them to present that image in their online practices by showing who they are collectively.

In their appearance, there is a responsibility to reflect their national identity (Yuval-Davis, 1997) and to create a brand image (Labrecque et al., 2011) for Saudi professional women. The women in my study repeatedly said ‘we’ in explaining online presence and networking, and they consider their experience to be like other Saudi professional women on LinkedIn. Some participants reflected a high level of social embeddedness (Ashmore, Deaux,

& McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004) regarding their identity work-related experiences by describing themselves as conservative women who are mindful about the image of Saudi women on social media, namely one that aligns with the perspective of Saudi culture and society. Thus, by considering who they are, where they came from, and what social norms and characteristics to embed into a collective identity as Saudi women, they develop their own forms of identity work during personal branding on LinkedIn.

The second form of the impact of ideal femininity is the narrative of women's characteristics, their personalities, and facial features. In participants narratives of identity work regarding ideal femininity, the narratives of Saudi women vary due to two main perspectives: (1) the ideas of women of how they are planning to present themselves and (2) how they want to be perceived by others. Personal branding experiences on LinkedIn for Saudi women show their consideration of personality, which appear in profile identification, engagement and communication, and facial features, which appear through their visual identity and personal photos. What is the appropriate way for Saudi women to construct a professional identity without being judged or pigeonholed by others on LinkedIn? The experience of identity work expresses how women want to remain within the notion of ideal Islamic woman. On the one hand, women are supposed to be shy, not show themselves to others and not talk about themselves freely or about their achievements loudly, as women with achievements are categorised as 'masculine' women by Saudi Arabian society (Song, 2019). On the other hand, women's feminine attributes, such as their facial features, appear to be a stressful aspect that affects their self-exposure on LinkedIn through fear that they will not be taken seriously as professional as Shahad explained:

> Many people from my job who deal with me online or through emails got excited when they saw me: "Oh, is that you, Shahad?" Maybe if I am using my personal photo, this might affect their impression, because I am petite; my

> body is small, as is my face. So, they might not take me seriously when I make decisions. Yet I can impose myself on them with my personality and my manner.

Additionally, women with ‘baby face’ features do not use their personal photos on LinkedIn because they think that would affect how people perceive them as professional women. Identity work shows the characteristics that Saudi women adopt or avoid in branding themselves they avoid looking ‘spoiled’ as in Layan experiences:

> My profile photo is a photo of a bracelet with my name engraved on it. I selected it quickly; I did not want to seem too feminine or too masculine! I cared about not looking like a spoiled girl; I wanted to look tough.

Or being a cute little ‘petite’ girl as in Reema’s experiences:

> I do not like using a personal photo. I might look like a cute little ‘petite’ girl, but on the inside, I am strong like a man. People are astonished at my speech; it sounds mature and strong, so my personal photo cannot represent who I am. I observed my colleagues who posted their personal photos, and I did not like that idea. My parents and husband would not mind, but I had a problem with it. People would classify me as an unprofessional woman.

Or one of the women who have already had great achievements as in Najla experiences:

> Having a LinkedIn account is a challenge. Because I was afraid of being called a masculine girl, I was slow in writing about my skills, achievements, and abilities on LinkedIn. I even delayed introducing myself on the professional and personal levels. I neglected LinkedIn; I did not read any comments or check the notifications. I have a problem in that I feel people cannot distinguish between showing off and introducing yourself. Generally speaking, the LinkedIn experience is uncomfortable; it bothers me to be connected to the world.

The impact of ideal femininity appeared in the narrative of women’s characteristics, putting pressure on women’s online presence. Doing online personal branding place women

with these characteristics outside the frame of the ideal Islamic woman. However, identity work of Saudi women has a clear vision of self-exposure that has been formed by their online personal branding in LinkedIn. Women's awareness of the nature of LinkedIn, collective and gendered identity offers distinctive practices of personal branding that are collective. Saudi women in their identity work are affected by the overall character of Saudi Arabian society, which is masculine. They want to be taken seriously and be 'tough' and 'strong' like men and not too feminine. This perspective challenges the ideal femininity. Therefore, the identity work of Saudi professional women facilitates the relationship between femininity and masculinity through navigating the femininity in the 'ideal Islamic woman' and women's preferences.

The final form of ideal femininity's impact is the narrative of being Saudi women interacting with men. In this part of the analysis, the actions of Saudi women and reactions are expressed by their tensions, beliefs, sociocultural norms, and attitudes toward Saudi men online. This appears in many narratives: first, their trust in fully identifying their profiles in LinkedIn with consideration of male mentality as Hussah explained:

> My profile photo on LinkedIn is blank! I do not trust men's mentality; I might work with a close-minded man who is ready to show my photo to his colleagues, and I do not want my personal photo to be used for unprofessional purposes.

Second, their stigmatised experiences of profile identification and engagement in relation to the reaction of men and unexcepted – and unwanted – men's participation in women's accounts as Farah experienced:

> My online experience was bad; when I signed up on LinkedIn in 2016, I posted my personal photo. Several men asked for my phone number for job interviews; I thought they were asking for my number for work, but they were asking to make friends with me. They were asking personal questions and, in

> the end, I found out that they were exploiting me. This gave me a negative attitude to LinkedIn. We Saudi women must be cautious; we cannot defend ourselves. If you block a man who has bothered you, you will be called a troublemaker, because the block is embarrassing to that man. In the past, I wrote only my first name with my personal photo, but now I have to write both my first name and surname and have removed my personal photo. I was mistreated because of my personal photo and my qualification, which was "Psychologist"; people were sending me messages saying, "Can you treat me?" Another man said, "How come you are working in a bank when you are a psychologist?", as if he was underestimating me. That is why my experience was bad, and men were behind these bad experiences. These things happened in the past, but today nobody can easily lie! There is more credibility on LinkedIn.

Finally, in the professional experiences of women and how they are underestimating themselves in comparison to men, Layan explained:

> Even now, I do not know how to deal with LinkedIn; I am not active on it, and I do not want to create high expectations in others' minds. Saudi women in general underestimate themselves, and so do I. On the other hand, Saudi men have high self-confidence. My CV is perfect and demonstrates my substantial experience, but I am always afraid of creating high expectations in other people when I do not reach those expectations.

When women explain their identity work, they consistently mention their masculine society and compare themselves with men in their phrasing. This situation shows the critical consideration of men in the experiences of women, whether in profile identification, engagement, networking, or connections. From analysing the data, the questions that come to the minds of women in their identity work are, 'how I should identify my profile?', 'do I really need to use my personal photo there?', 'if so, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using my personal photo?', 'what do other Saudi women do in their profile identification?',

‘how do I avoid being misunderstood as Saudi women in my online presence?’ and ‘what expectations should I establish as a female?’ These and many other questions explain their identity negotiation, management, and work. In women’s narratives with respect to their experiences with men, two kinds of stances are adopted. First, ‘avoidance’ stance that put women on the safe side of presenting the ideal Islamic woman by not fully completing their profile or by not engaging and networking with Saudi men. Second, the ‘initiative’ stance that encourage women to try, take the lead, and see what happens. The first stance of avoidance is affected by the tensions in being women, their sociocultural norms’ consideration of women as private, the characteristic of society for being masculine, and the opinions of women regarding not trusting the mentality of men as in Hussah’s experience above. The second stance of initiative is affected by the professional needs of women and the desires for change, the perspectives of women on professional identity requirements, and self-worth and self-confidence of women. Research participant’s identity work consists of both real and imagined reactions in navigating the appropriate way of branding themselves on LinkedIn.

Saudi women’s experience of identity work is an opportunity to reveal their opinions about men by criticising the mentality of some Saudi men and describing how this mentality could be a threat to their online identity work, such as using their personal photos inappropriately by showing them to other men and talking about the women. In addition, women do not trust the professional community (i.e., men) on LinkedIn, but they still have positive feelings regarding their experience as Saudi professional women. Some women underestimate themselves, which is common among Saudi women, so some participants categorise themselves as being in the group of ‘women who underestimate themselves’ and compared them to men. Thus, they extended their self-doubt over their roles as Saudi women on LinkedIn to their online personal branding. The negative attitudes to women’s experiences on LinkedIn are due to the kinds of people they have met and the situations they have faced as

Saudi professional women. There is a conflict in that some groups – including both men and women – feel that women's use of a personal photo would damage the authenticity and image of the ideal Islamic woman of Saudi professional women (Doumato, 1992). Hence, appearing online as open-minded Saudi women might cause Saudi men with a lack of awareness to bother, underestimate, and disrespect them and women might be categorised as liberals who accept such behaviour from others.

As a result of Saudi women's status in society, some Saudi women show stigmatised roles (Abokhodair & Vieweg, 2016; Goffman, 1963) in their professional identity construction. As Goffman (1963) states, this stigma is not a concrete barrier that separates individuals into normal and 'different'; they are not people, they are perspectives. Therefore, Saudi women's perspective of 'being Saudi women' considering the ideal Islamic woman in their identity work is in some cases a stigmatised perspective that results in stigmatised roles in their online personal branding. Their identity work consists of two main roles: tension management in their discredited experiences and information control in their discreditable experiences (Goffman, 1963), the combination of which facilitate professional identity construction.

Conclusion

In analysing identity work of Saudi women during online personal branding, it is apparent that there is usually a moment that allowed them to stand back, look carefully at themselves and open their eyes to their differences and their distinctive selves. Such attitude and evaluation are not a bad experience in which 'different' means 'awkward', but a moment that inspired them to do their best when constructing and playing their professional roles and overcoming all the various tensions they experienced. They acted with regard to sociocultural rules, the domination of guardianship, and the impacts of ideal femininity. Saudi women use

personal brands to confirm both their existence and their effectiveness as professional women who desire high-quality lives.

Chapter 5: From Being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to Becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat*

Introduction

This chapter analyses Saudi women's identity work thorough personal branding on LinkedIn. Chapter five explains how Saudi women move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* (the plural of the Arabic adjective for marginalised women) to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* (the plural of the Arabic adjective for empowered women). The meanings of *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen Almara'ah* often appear in the data involving Saudi women's professional identity construction. The data analysed in chapter four shows how being on a professional platform such as LinkedIn is nothing less than vital for Saudi women. On the other hand, the research shows that it is not easy to build a personal brand, to identify oneself, to engage, to network and to connect. I can see, as one of the Saudi women, the effort, time, techniques and feelings women experience, which raises the questions of what personal branding can offer Saudi women: why do they use the Western phenomenon of 'personal branding' on a Western professional platform, LinkedIn, to construct professional identities and share their professions? Why do they consider it so important to follow some exceptions when identifying themselves on LinkedIn? Why, with all the tensions they feel and face, do they still practise identity work through online personal branding to present a better version of themselves? And what are they aiming for by being online as part of the LinkedIn?

To address these questions, I analyse the data deeper to explore the importance of being online on a professional platform with all the gender and sociocultural restrictions that Saudi women have experienced.

This chapter will be structured as follows: first, the concept of women's empowerment is critiqued within the Middle Eastern context, offering the local *Tamkeen Almara'ah.* The second section analyses Saudi women becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* by navigating the sense of *Tahmeesh* (marginalised) and *Tamkeen* (empowerment) in their identity work during online personal branding on LinkedIn. The third section analyses Saudi women's interpretation of the new Saudi Arabia that related to *Tamkeen Almara'ah.* The fourth section expresses the need for *Tamkeen Almara'ah* by analysing professional identity construction by examining the initial thoughts of women about the identity construction, the difficulties of forming a professional identity, and the ways to build a reputation by considering the women's perceptions of being distinctive as a brand within their status as Saudi women. Finally, the fifth section offers an analysis of being *Nessa' Mumaknat* in a conservative, male-dominated society.

Interpretation of the meaning of the women's empowerment in the Middle Eastern context (*Tamkeen Almara'ah*)

After analysing many definitions of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* in Arabic resources, eight of the most appropriate definitions were translated to English to highlight nuances and to stress the importance of having an adequate definition that embodies all the meanings and ideas that are included within all eight definitions in the Table 5.1 below.

Source	Translated definition	Arabic definition
Shalhoub (2015)	A process of offering women the opportunity to have all their legitimate rights in society.	تمكين المرأة هو عملية إتاحة الفرصـة للمرأة للحصول على حقوقها الشرعية في المجتمع
	A process of enhancing women's personal and social power in order to improve their quality of life.	التمكين عملية تعزيز للقوة الشخصية والاجتماعية للنساء لتحسين حياتهن
	A process that allows women to participate in decision making.	التمكين هو عملية لإتاحة الفرصة للمرأة في المشاركة في اتخاذ القرارات
	A process to help women claim their rights.	التمكين هو عملية لمساعدة النساء للمطالبة بحقوقهن
Al-afifi (2015)	To be freer in determining their choices and activities in order to improve their lives so that they become active members of society, not passive recipients of assistance	التمكين هو أن تصبح النساء أكثر حرية في تحديد خياراتهم وأنشطتهم بهدف تحسين معيشتهم حتى تصبح عنصراً نشطاً وفاعلاً وليس متلقياً سلبياً لمساعدة من مصدر خارجي.

Table 5.1: Arabic definitions of *Tamkeen Almara'ah*

I adopt the following definition of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* which is grounded and developed from the data:

A combination of ongoing processes that employ, activate, and enhance the presence of women in their communities by opening the door for them to be visible and participate in decision making. Such practices will allow women to exercise effective roles in their personal, social, and professional lives, in addition to providing tools and systems that guarantee their legitimate rights, taking into account the nature of society and Arab identity as a female.

تمكين المرأة:

هو مزيج من العمليات المستمرة التي تقوم بتوظيف وتفعيل وتعزيز وجود النساء في مجتمعاتهم، وذلك من خلال فتح المجال لهم في التواجد الفعلي والمشاركة في صناعة القرارات، عن طريق اتاحة الفرصة لممارسة ادوارهم الفعّالة في

حركة الحياة الشخصية والاجتماعية والمهنية. بالإضافة الى توفير الأدوات والأنظمة التي تضمن حقوقهم الشرعية مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار طبيعة المجتمع والهوية العربية كأنثى.

To be empowered women, or *Mumaknah*, in Saudi Arabian society means to have visibility, ability, and participation in public society (van Geel, 2012). *Tamkeen* is a status given to women in society, enabling them to be visible in public, to make decisions about their lives, and participate in decision-making processes of their country. The opposite of *Tamkeen* is *Tahmeesh*, so to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* (empowered women) requires women to be well educated, but not all women who are well educated can have *Tamkeen* status. Government policies, family regulations, and society's level of conservatism and male domination; all play a role in making *Tamkeen Almara'ah* available to Saudi women. The responsibility that Saudi women have is to work on their self-development, become well educated and be ready for the opportunities that may be offered to them. If women come from open-minded families or families consider education to be very important for women, Saudi women can obtain support from their families to be successful women. If not, women need to work on their self-development until they find opportunities or get married to an open-minded man to achieve success.

Usually, women who are educated and get a job or become businesswomen derive their level of *Tamkeen* from their status as working women. They have autonomy and mobility as professionals. Education, qualifications, and professional activity can work as tools for women to gain access to autonomy and mobility and then become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. For Saudi women, having a professional identity is an opportunity to improve their status and gain their *Tamkeen*. Professional activity plays a vital role in offering Saudi women a sense of *Tamkeen* through having autonomy and mobility, as Le Renard (2014) explains in her study of Saudi women:

> Paid employment, particularly in the private sector, is experienced as a way to rise to another, more mobile lifestyle, but also to gain self-awareness, even if conditions are unfavourable: a poor salary, notably in comparison to the public sector, and underqualified work, considering their diplomas. Women I spoke with shrugged off these various drawbacks. In taking up paid employment, they projected themselves into other modes of subjectivation, (normative) models of professional femininity through which they could define themselves as autonomous individuals vis-à-vis their families. They did not describe paid employment as a means for emancipation of women in general (the word "emancipation" is never used), but rather as a means of progressing as individuals (pp. 72-73).

This description of Saudi women's experience in employment is like their experiences of constructing a professional identity in their daily lives or identity work through online personal branding on LinkedIn. In both situations, they look at being professional women as an opportunity that serves their needs and wants in life, makes them visible, and reforms their status in society. In the next section, the ways in which Saudi women navigate their sense of *Tamkeen* in their identity work during online personal branding is discussed.

Navigating the sense of *Tamkeen* and *Tahmeesh Almara'ah* in identity work through online personal branding

The identity work during online personal branding for Saudi women on LinkedIn, is composed of many feelings, reflections, and rewards. Saudi women choose to be on professional platform to have a professional identity and gain *Tamkeen*. Saudi women's sense of navigating *Tamkeen* from their online identity work begins when they become aware of the importance of having personal brands and grasp the usefulness of LinkedIn as a professional platform. The extracts below show the ways that participants express their narrative and performance of identity work when doing online personal branding on LinkedIn as 'Saudi

women'. When my research participants were asked about personal branding as Saudi women, their answers express, first, their realisation of themselves on the platform and the way of looking at LinkedIn as women; then, they explained the consequences of the sociocultural rules, such as gender segregation, that make them negotiate their status of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* in Saudi Arabian society. Research participants explained a sense of *Tamkeen* through the enthusiasm of expressing themselves on a professional platform and explain what it is like for Saudi women to be in an open, mixed-gender online professional sphere.

Women thus gain *Tamkeen* from professional situations, such as Nehal who considers being part of LinkedIn as an achievement for herself:

> LinkedIn for me is like an achievement point, whereby I add my recent updates, like when I became assistant professor; I wrote that on LinkedIn so people could know my latest updates.

Similarly, Ghala explained how LinkedIn allows her to showcase her professional improvement and success:

> LinkedIn is a means to show my achievements as a Saudi woman. So, I signed up for LinkedIn to look for professional opportunities, to introduce my business and to show off my professional identity and achievements to the people who taught me and studied with me at university.

Moreover, Dalal explained that in her experience, being part of LinkedIn has been rewarding for her as one of the Saudi women:

> LinkedIn is valuable and helpful for me. It helps me to express and identify myself easily; it becomes so motivating. Based on my experience with LinkedIn, I can say "never underestimate anything you do! And tell it to people!" LinkedIn is a professional platform in which I express myself, along with my career and what I do in life that makes me proud of myself.

These first three extracts are typical examples of the ways that Saudi women reflect on their LinkedIn experiences by considering LinkedIn to be a professional medium to present their achievements and profession, which they cannot show openly in a segregated society. Through identity work during online personal branding on LinkedIn, Saudi women exhibit self-esteem and self-efficacy, gaining meaningfulness as a trigger for professional identity work (Lepisto et al., 2015). LinkedIn works as an achievement point for Saudi women. They use it to demonstrate their quality and professional sides, which they cannot do widely offline due to Saudi Arabian's conservative, male-dominated society. LinkedIn also offers Saudi women a chance to reflect on their professional achievements and feel proud of themselves. Identity work on LinkedIn serves as a fulfilment practice that allows Saudi women to affirm their self-worth through online personal branding.

However, as explained in the online tensions section of chapter four, Saudi women face certain difficulties and feel stress during identity work that generates a sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat*. This situation arises from their lack of experience in self-presentation and self-exposure to the public, whether offline or online (Aljuwaiser, 2018). Saudi women's narrative and performance of identity work building online personal brands reflect perceptions about their professional identity, their collective identity, and their very selves by expressing different forms of emotions and thoughts that allow them to fluctuate between the sense of *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen.* Even after having identified the profiles on LinkedIn, some research participants still underestimate themselves or their professional achievements and doubt LinkedIn's effectiveness for them as Saudi women. Reflecting on identity work and personal branding, women express their sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat*.

Hanan points out the similarity between her online and offline existence by acknowledging that Saudi women are not raised for public exposure or self-presentation:

> I wish I could work to make achievements in order to share them online. I believe that Saudi women have strong abilities, but they are hidden. They cannot distinguish themselves and their content online. But we can easily show ourselves offline. I see people using LinkedIn in a professional way, so I am starting to watch how they use it in order to learn from them.

In real life, there is freedom that exists in communities of females, but the women are not taught how to present themselves. If Saudi women were not *Muhamashat* by being visible and recognised in society, they would have the ability to explain themselves or at least find a way to develop a distinctive professional identity.

van Geel (2012) discusses the standpoint of Saudi women regarding *Tamkeen*, which means stopping gender segregation and adopting *Ikhielat* (gender mixing) in Saudi Arabian society to open more professional opportunities for Saudi women:

> …true *tamkin* can only be reached through *ikhtilat*, therewith learning how to deal with men. A small minority believes that *tamkin* can and should be reached through women-only spaces. A minority maintains that empowerment of women can be reached through both *ikhtilat* and women-only spaces. The main argument of this minority is that women-only labour spaces allow women who do not want, or whose guardians do not allow them, to work in an *ikhtilat* environment to participate in the labour market. However, as one activist noted, women-only spaces are only empowering to a certain extent. The (mixed) main office, where the decision-making is and where the upper management is situated, is the place where one would find the opportunities for promotion. Women working in a women-only branch thus hit the glass ceiling very early, limiting *tamkin* to certain jobs in certain fields of work (p. 74).

The way Saudi women face the tensions of identity work and undertaking personal branding practices was to question the importance of LinkedIn in their identity narrative and

performance. Ultimately, they realise LinkedIn effectiveness as professionals by engaging in a self-dialogue, as it is in Fatimah statement:

> I was not aware of the importance of LinkedIn. Yet, I was continuously thinking about it! That is why I would reopen it and tell myself I had to care more about it. Even now, I am still thinking about focusing on identifying myself more, to make a name or brand for myself.

The research showed that there are reactions toward LinkedIn that reflect Saudi women's sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* and their desire – and even need – to become *Nessa' Mumaknat.* They underestimate themselves on LinkedIn, whether in profile identification or engagement and connection. Participants always think of the reactions of others and avoid triggering high expectations from their online appearance. Due to their status in Saudi Arabian society, the research participants showed that they have little experience in presenting themselves or being shown by their compatriots as worthy or experts in profession. Thus, some Saudi women bring a sense of *Tahmeesh* from their everyday life experiences to their online appearance, as Layan explained in her experience:

> I have never commented on any post on LinkedIn; I have to be highly skilled in order not to make mistakes on this professional platform. I do not consider myself a highly skilled person. If I really like a post, I give it a like. I do not want to look like an idiot or seem too active on LinkedIn; that is why I do not participate in it that much.

During this interview with Layan, I discovered that she imposes conditions on herself to engage in LinkedIn exactly as society obliges them to act offline. Saudi women navigate their sense of *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen* on LinkedIn differently, depending on the professional needs and their awareness of the importance of LinkedIn. Saudi women experience these situations when

considering identity work on LinkedIn as a self-improvement opportunity to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*.

In addition, there is another type of identity work that Saudi women express when navigating the sense of *Tamkeen* through online personal branding. By feeling the tensions of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* move, through their online practice on LinkedIn, to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. Participants look at LinkedIn and personal branding as opportunities to act on reforming their status and accept responsibility to create change by representing a modern kind of Saudi professional women. Thus, Saudi women use LinkedIn as a professional platform to increase their visibility, show their capabilities, and overcome sociocultural rules such as gender segregation.

Hanna was aware of feeling bothered by being on LinkedIn, but, on the other hand, she knew what it had to offer; an identity (the reward) and being proud of herself. This reward acts as a *Tamkeen* tool that motivates Saudi women to challenge themselves and the traditional roles of Saudi women to change their status as she explained:

> LinkedIn bothers me because it allows everybody to check my account. On the other hand, it gives me an identity, it makes me focus on my abilities and skills, and it makes me prouder of myself. But I still need motivation! Because I do not like people to know about me.

Identity work displays feelings of *Tahmeesh* and a desire to become *Mumaknat* in many situations, starting with being uncomfortable about becoming visible and recognised in public, which is a key element of having a professional identity. Saudi women's identity work reveals that branding themselves online is a practice that is well out of their comfort zone. Many participants admitted the inconvenience of self-presentation and self-exposure, but they show their needs and desires to create a professional identity and achieve visibility and recognition

on LinkedIn. In their identity work, research participants try to deal with unpleasant feelings by focusing on the benefits and opportunities they gain from being on a public, professional platform. What is fundamental in Saudi women's navigation of *Tamkeen* is that Saudi women are ready to experience the discomfort of letting their reluctance go so that they can practice their professions, encouraging new feelings or pride in themselves.

During the interviews, many Saudi women explained that being on LinkedIn made them proud of themselves and of other Saudi professional women. This feeling of pride emphasises the need for Saudi women to become *Mumaknat*. The interviewees' feeling of pride also evinces their willingness to reshape their existence in the professional sphere. Being aware of unpleasant feelings when doing identity work encourages Saudi women to direct their emotions to the positive rewards, that they could obtain from being on LinkedIn. Through LinkedIn, Saudi women also practice their need for self-development; they use their LinkedIn profiles to practice their sense of *Tamkeen* when they get it from a new career, promotion, or educational achievement, such as a master's degree. When adding new professional accomplishments, Saudi women reflect on themselves by comparing their previous and current professional selves to overcome any worry they may feel. Najla says:

> LinkedIn was worrying me; I felt that everyone else was more advanced and better than me. This belief changed after I lived outside Saudi Arabia for a while, in the United States, where I earned my master's degree in human resources, and so I started to appreciate myself. When I went back to Saudi Arabia, I immediately started on improving my LinkedIn account. I felt that I was equal to men and must distinguish myself. When I saw what people were doing on LinkedIn, I liked the idea.

Another situation that arises from participants when navigating *Tamkeen* is building their professional careers based on other professionals on LinkedIn. Women treat LinkedIn as

a career advisor by searching for similar professionals and looking at their career paths to develop their own. Even though they may miss out on professional opportunities in real life, LinkedIn acts as a *Tamkeen* tool to build their knowledge of their possibilities for development. Self-development and having a rewarding career offer Saudi women the opportunity to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*, as Shahad explained:

> I identify myself on LinkedIn by giving a brief information– not too much – things that are related to professionalism. While I was writing my CV, I noticed that I might benefit from knowing other professional people, because they would open my eyes; for example, I will know the institutions they are following and their ways of building a career. Therefore, I built my CV and profile on LinkedIn based on other professional people on that platform. I am looking for other people who are specialised in my field and searching for courses, especially international ones. Where have they gone thus far? What positions they are holding. And if I like the career of one of them, I search for how he or she got there. And I take the same courses.

Research participants are practicing what Grénman, Hakala, and Mueller (2019) call wellness branding: "A process of identity and lifestyle construction and self-promotion through various practices of wellness and different forms of self-branding, the goal being to create and brand one's optimal – balanced – self" (p. 471).

Moreover, Saudi women in navigating their sense of *Tamkeen* through identity work form positive feelings and opinions about being on a professional platform. Their positive reflection emphasises their need to be visible and willingness to show their capabilities. They express their feelings about the entire experience of having a personal brand on a professional platform by determining the added value that they, as professional Saudi women, find in professional identity construction on LinkedIn. This added value can be felt through the ways that Saudi women perceive the reward from experiencing identity work considering their

sociocultural and gender background. In the interviews, women were asked about identity work during online personal branding to see what they could do for themselves in the professional sphere. Positive experiences emerged after they expressed their concerns and tensions about their cultural, social, and gender background. Asking about identity work showed how Saudi women were happy to be part of a professional circle in LinkedIn. Nadiah explained in her interview:

> I was very excited to enter this world; I had to know people who would help me. I like to represent myself; LinkedIn gave me this opportunity. I would like to improve myself. I improved my profile to represent who I really am. LinkedIn helps you to show people who you are, what your experiences are. Without LinkedIn, I do not expect to have an opportunity to introduce myself and make connections. ... I remember when I first signed in, I felt it like it was a door for me to enter the professional world, it was giving me an opportunity to reach people that I could not reach before, whether they are in the US, Europe, Australia, or wherever, in a professional way. Social media enabled me to do it!

Likewise, Douaa stated:

> I was really thankful for this step; I felt, I am evaluating myself. Because when you spend time doing something and you explain what you have done to people, they say 'wow', and you feel appreciated. I was happy when I noticed that searching for me increased, and my connection requests were raised too. It gives me good feelings. I think Saudi women should understand LinkedIn and its importance; if they use it right, it might open-up the right way for them to marketing themselves.

While retaining participants' respect for sociocultural norms, they want to have a professional identity. The identity work of participates focus on learning, understanding, motivating, and practicing on LinkedIn. Saudi women know they are different from other

women globally (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019), but they also realise that LinkedIn and having a personal brand is very important to them because of their status in Saudi Arabian society. The research participants' expressions reflect how the practice of brand-building is new for them, but it is valuable, useful, and helpful. It fulfils their professional needs, helps overcome sociocultural tensions and clears up the identity confusion of Saudi women by helping to construct genuine professional identities. As seen in all data extracts above, women use LinkedIn as a window to value their achievements, to say, look at us; though we have been not recognised for long, we are already professionals. Saudi women are not accustomed to discussing their achievements and therefore, with LinkedIn's requirements, they reflect on and evaluate their professional careers, feeling grateful for what they have done for themselves and society. Identity work through online personal branding puts Saudi women in experimental situations of counting their achievements, developing their careers, looking at how far they come in their profession, and learning to show the way to others to ensure benefits and reform sociocultural norms.

The following section reveals the interpretation of Saudi women regarding the new Saudi Arabia in relation to the status of women. The analysis supports the research finding that women need to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* in their professions.

Saudi women's interpretation of the new Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a collectivist, conservative culture and society that is currently undergoing enormous shifts in policies and regulations. Saudi women have benefited from these changes, as there have been many reforms related to their rights and status. The most frequently cited example of these changes is that women are now allowed to drive cars, an example of the relaxation of sociocultural norms (Aljuwaiser, 2018; Hvidt, 2018). Gender

segregation is not as strict as before, women are involved in professions, and many regulations that have limited women, such as the patriarchal system (*Al Wilayah*), have been repealed. Women's mobility has been facilitated, and new job positions have been opened to women. I was collecting data at the time when women began to feel this sense of *Tamkeen* from the social reforms (*Islah*) undertaken by the Saudi government. Many of the research participants happily noted that they drove their own cars to the interviews. When I asked about the difficulties of professional identity construction, their answers reflected their status as women before and after the reforms.

The data reflect not only what has changed in society, but also the hopes for a better life. The research findings show the way that women consider changes in Saudi Arabia as a moment of relief in their narrative of professional identity construction. They express this opinion by holding themselves responsible for appearing as successful professional women. In this section, the moment of relief for Saudi women and the way in which it relates to participants sense of becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* are analysed. The moment of relief appears in the women's way of forming opinions about the new Saudi Arabia and how they have personally benefited as Saudi women.

The moment of relief in experiencing Saudi women's new status

The reform in Saudi Arabia happened quickly and suddenly. It was a shock to Saudi Arabian society and led to happy, amazing and wonderful changes for Saudi women that are a form of *Tamkeen*. These changes for Saudi women can be thought about as a top-down *Tamkeen* initiative after van Geel (2012) and which can appear using one or more of three strategies: first, reform (*Islah*) means political reform that comes from the government. The second is raising awareness among Saudi women, and the third is segregated public spaces that offer room only to women. The changes in Saudi Arabia opened the door for women's *Tamkeen*

by reforming women's social status in society and increased awareness for women by offering educational and training opportunities. However, the third strategy of van Geel (2012) does not connect to what was happening in society. Indeed, the opposite was the case as Saudi women relaxed the changes for themselves through sociocultural rules such as gender segregation and veiling. Women had many different reactions to the changes in Saudi Arabia: (1) predicting what would happen because of the changes; (2) expressing their wishes and emotions; and (3) committing to being part of the changes that would benefit Saudi women.

Questioning the changes at the time and analysing women's identity narrative and performance is critical because it reflects the conceptions of women and changes in Saudi Arabia. Some women look at the changes as improvements for women in terms of mindset, ambitions, personalities, and reality. Hussah illustrates that the changes "opened women's eyes":

> The changes improved the mindset and ambitions of Saudi girls. They have become independent, and they have character. They have become brave about expressing their ideas, opinions and ambitions. These changes have opened women's eyes to success.

In other words, the changes allow women to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. Some women expressed their happiness and enthusiasm very clearly, committing themselves to support and being part of these changes, as Reem notes:

> Cool, thank God, this is very good. This is nice. I hope all these changes in my country will benefit all of us. I am willing to use all my power to help make this country better for me and my future children and am now focusing on building myself.

Some women expressed their happiness, saying that they are glad, not just for themselves but also for their daughters since the changes over time will significantly change

the status of women in the future of Saudi Arabian society. Young professional women said these changes happened just in time for their professional lives, while other women wished they were younger, as Reema stated:

> I am very happy that I am witnessing the changes; I only wish I were younger.

However, some women considered social norms and reactions rather than expressing their own opinions or feelings of relief, as Layan opinion:

> There are pros and cons. Although our government seeks to empower women, we still don't have a cultural and social mindset that supports the changes.

The focus was on expectations of how society would receive and react to these changes. This response is profoundly revealing of the status of *Tahmeesh* to which Saudi women had become accustomed; rather than express their own feelings, participants automatically consider how others – in this case, the non-specific and collectivist 'society' – will respond to changes.

Taken together, van Geel (2012) view of top-down *Tamkeen* initiatives, with reform strategies, raising the awareness of women and relaxing gender segregation in Saudi Arabian society. Professional Saudi women find ways to have a fulfilling work life. Women have acknowledged the difficulties they have faced and shown how happy they are about the changes. They are happy because the amount of effort they used to exert to be recognised and have a professional identity has been reduced by the Kingdom's new polices (Hvidt, 2018), which will offer them the chance to rise and become *Mumaknat*. The ways Saudi women express their views about the changes in Saudi Arabia and their experiences of self- identity reflect what Lepisto et al. (2015) called identity work triggers that support identity motives. The authors identify two types of identity triggers: "contextual change" (Lepisto et al., 2015, p. 18), such as what happened in Saudi Arabia that motivated Saudi women's *Tamkeen*, and

"strong situations" (Lepisto et al., 2015, p. 18), which can be seen in the changes for women's status in Saudi Arabian society. The next section analyse how Saudi women reflect the need for *Tamkeen* or the feeling of *Tahmeesh* in their professional identity construction.

The Need for *Tamkeen Almara'ah* in the Narrative of Professional Identity Construction

This section considers professional identity construction as a basis for investigating identity work through online personal branding. Professional identity construction expresses the outlooks of the narrative of Saudi women's beliefs, and experiences. This section explores the ways women narrate their professional identity construction experiences and introduce themselves to the public, how they built reputations and how they defined themselves as brands. Their professional identity construction resonates with their sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* and stress their need to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. In analysing Saudi women's narrative of professional identity construction, I found that they construct their identity based on their sense of *Tamkeen* or the feel of *Tahmeesh*.

First thoughts in identity construction narrative

The first thing Saudi women talked about when they were interviewed concerning professional identity construction, they drew on narratives which were combined the facilitation or impediment of professional identity construction. Examples include family support, qualifications, and specialty, cultural and social attributes, and the status of women in Saudi Arabian society. During the interview, they were asked how they constructed their identities. These women placed significant emphasis on their collective identity and gendered background, and their family background and history influenced the ways their professional identities were constructed. The narratives that were drawn on in Saudi women's professional

identity construction include issues that impeded or facilitate that process and reflected a sense of *Tamkeen* and a feeling of *Tahmeesh*.

The Saudi women's sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* is apparent in their narratives about identity construction. Participants consider the underestimation of women in Saudi Arabian society. I asked them about their ideas, their approaches and their preferences, and they answered with their concerns, negative memories and commitment experience to becoming professional Saudi women. They reflect their feelings of *Tahmeesh* when they talk, but also express their claims about those feelings. For example, "I always try to avoid," "I do not have limitations," "I know myself" and "I broke a lot of taboos" are all reactions that seek to define who professional Saudi women are. The research participants show in their narrative that know their reality, society, and families, and they do not give up trying their best in their professional lives. In the interviews, the women talked about their ways of overcoming the stereotyping of Saudi women and stressed the quality of professional Saudi women. Women expressed their sense of *Tahmeesh* or *Tamkeen* from their own experiences at work before talking about being Saudi women in a way that would show an ability to plan for professional success, capability, and quality of work.

Some Saudi women experience difficulties with their clients; because they are women, the quality of their work is regularly undermined by the male domination of all the professions, which Hussah experiences:

> I always try to avoid society's view of women. It is not a view of inferiority as much as it is the view of weakness that the Saudi men unfortunately still think about Saudi women. The unfortunate thing that happens to me in every project I start with a client shows that I am a woman as a project manager. Regardless of my resume and years of experience, because I am a woman,

> they will say, “no, no, no ... we do not want her.” But after they work with me, they change their minds and become repeat customers.

Further problems arise because their families and Saudi Arabian society are not supportive of them, from a lack of experience of discovering themselves or from sociocultural rules such as gender segregation and veiling (Pharaon, 2004). For example, Layla talking about not supportive family and society:

> I am persistent. I do not have limitations, which means that – even if my environment is not supportive – I am still willing to do more. I might be like many women in Saudi Arabian society; we may not live in a supportive society or family, but we persevere; we try until we get what we want.

All the situations explain Saudi women’s experience of being *Nessa’ Muhamashat* for a long time. A lack of knowledge and experience in seeing themselves as capable and visible human beings and coming from an unsupportive atmosphere led to a *Tahmeesh* situation for these women, resulting in confusion and a lack of full awareness of the importance of professional identity.

The findings express the need for Saudi women to have *Tamkeen* to construct a professional identity without being burdened by their cultural, societal, familial, and gendered identities. Being women in Saudi Arabian society has profoundly affected their identity construction. When expressing their experience, many Saudi women considered their gender identity first and said something like “women in this society,” which means that their status as Saudi women affected their professional identity construction quality. These experiences reveal the need for *Tamkeen*. Despite all these challenges, it is clear from the above extracts that the women are trying and showing their desire to be visible, recognised and acknowledged. Thus, if we are talking about the women and what they have done for themselves, we can say and see a lot. Saudi women work in a wide range of professions, and there are many

professional Saudi women in different sectors, both inside Saudi Arabia and overseas. They worked on themselves, developed their professional skills, studied, worked, and aimed for the best in their life. An example of Saudi women's participation in society appears in Quamar (2016):

> Saudi women's participation in media, civil society and other sectors such as business, arts and fashion has witnessed a significant increase, both in terms of their quantity and in terms of the debates they have generated on women's rights. Many Saudi women such as Norah al-Fayez (educational administration), Samia al-Amoudi (medicine), Lubna al-Olayan (finance), Sarah Al Ayed (business), Hatoon al-Fassi (academics and social work), Samar Fatany (journalism), Suhaila Zain al- Abideen (human rights), Haifa Mansour (film), and Manal AlDowayan (art) have achieved leadership positions in various professions. These developments have impacted the overall debate on women's empowerment (tamkin al-mara't) in the kingdom (p. 326).

Saudi women who have nurtured their professional identities and are known for specific professions or accomplishments needed a sense of *Tamkeen* to build their reputations and reach their goals. They grew up in open-minded families, and some raised outside Saudi Arabia in a different kind of society, and they have supportive families or partners who encouraged them to act beyond the traditional image of Saudi women. Saudi women expressed the importance of having a sense of *Tamkeen* in their professional lives; without it, they would not be able to become who they are. In their professional identity construction, they explain the kind of support they have from their families, husbands, or qualifications, which give them a sense of *Tamkeen* as women in Saudi Arabian society.

Identity work narratives of Saudi women reveal the elements that facilitate having a professional identity. Regardless of their ambitions and self-worth, they appreciate the people

and things that have helped them reach this point in their lives. For Saudi women, having a professional identity depends on many elements beyond self-knowledge and ambition. They need a supportive family as Najd experiences:

> I believe upbringing and education have had a great effect on me. I raised in the UK; my father used to take me with him when he saw his friends, so that made me social, confident and bold. These behaviours have built Najd, along with the support of my family. They support me; they always push and encourage me. For example, my mother leaves everything behind to travel with me on my professional trips as I cannot travel alone. My family supports me because they believe in me. I think most of the girls do not get family support.

As Soha stated her gratitude of having supportive family and husband that helped her to reach professional goals:

> Thank God! I had a supportive family before I got married, and when I got married, my husband turned out to be supportive, too. I have been in a fellowship program for three years, and I have attained my experience and basic knowledge. But I still need to build up my experience, so I can be a real consultant. That is why I prefer to work in a place that adds to my skills. Working in a good place brings you a good reputation. I hold a strong certificate in medicine.

Nehal in her narrative explained how being a medical doctor helps in gaining *Tamkeen* and distinguished her:

> As medical doctors, I believe that our field helps distinguish us because there has been a scarcity of medical specialisation among female faculty members from the beginning, especially Saudi women in the medical colleges at Saudi universities. There is a need in the labour market at hospitals. This serves us a lot, as female doctors, even if we have not tried to distinguish ourselves or work on our professional identity; in fact, the work distinguishes us.

Even with impressive qualifications, Saudi women cannot succeed without their family agreement. Family and community support is vital for successfully becoming professionals. Families and guardians participate in the future of Saudi girls, and the women whom their families supported feel their good fortune when compared to other Saudi women; they retain this appreciation for their whole lives. This appeared clearly in the previous chapter where guardianship acts as one kind of the tensions that impact professional identity construction for participants.

In the past, for Saudi women to become a banker or doctor required an open-minded family because these professions are mixed-gender environments. Studying and working in the medical sector means that women will communicate directly with men, which is unusual in a segregated society that considers women to be private objects. It is similar when working at a bank; even though some work areas are segregated, management and everyday communication involves male managers or colleagues, even if on the phone, which is still unacceptable for Saudi Arabian society. While things are now changing, and from analysing Saudi women's narratives in the present study, family support was crucial for women to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. It expresses a sort of *Tamkeen* that is given to these women which helped them to become known in society and develop their professional identity. Participants who recounted these experiences are branch managers in banks, medical doctors at the consultant level and marketers. Through these elements – family, guardian and speciality or qualifications – they are able to attain their professional goals. Pharaon (2004) stated:

> Within each Saudi family or community, there are liberal men who are open to new ideas and methods, and conservative women who resist change, and vice versa. Some daughters will find support from their Saudi fathers for pursuing their education, careers, or travels, in the face of unyielding

> mothers. Some sisters will find their strongest allies in their Saudi brothers when they need to lobby their parents for more freedom (P. 358).

The narrative of identity construction difficulties as a result of *Tahmeesh*

Analysing the narratives of professional identity construction of Saudi women has revealed certain situations. They questioned the importance of their self-identity, realised their lack of experiences at forming a professional identity, and talked about their professional identity as something lacking. Saudi women in this research explained their discontent with Saudi masculine society and saw how women always came second. Participants demonstrated the impact of social status of Saudi women and how it affects them to have a professional identity. The difficulties of having a professional identity for the research participants express a sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat*.

Reema's narrative considers the history of Saudi women with a lack of identity construction experiences:

> Our history as Saudi women – my generation and the generation of our mothers – had no experience with self-identification. There was no prepared path for us. I feel that we recently created and paved the way. So, we feel leery about whether this is the right path. I mean, we do not have a wide variety of professional experiences; even our mothers who worked were all in the field of education. Mothers in the past were either housewives or teachers.

The identity construction narratives of Saudi women are shaped from their sense of having been *Nessa' Muhamashat* for a long time. Given the reality of a masculine society and gender segregation, women were simply not visible and must develop professional selves to obtain autonomy and make dramatic changes in the social ideology of Saudi Arabia. Participants do not think about themselves as individuals but seek to gain their *Tamkeen*

through their jobs. They do not wish merely to carve out their own place in society but also to be successful, have autonomy, and improve their status as professional women. Saudi women lack of experience in constructing a professional identity and remarks about the difficulties of that process reflects sense of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* because these difficulties have prevented women from participating and being visible in public, which are requirements for becoming *Mumaknat* (van Geel, 2012). Saudi women explain their experience of forming a professional identity in real life regarding their society's characteristics and their status in that society. The experiences increase the importance of what van Geel (2012) calls the rise of women (*Al Nuhud bi Almara'ah*), which occurs in two stages: first, women's awareness of the world around them and then, women's awareness of their rights (van Geel, 2012). The experience of professional identity construction reflects the women's sense of *Tahmeesh*; it could be considered practice at raising their self-awareness by reflecting on who they are and who they want to become.

In their narrative of identity construction difficulties, these Saudi women identify the main obstacles that prevent them from having a complete professional identity: the way men look at them, the way society views them, the history of Saudi women, the way they look at themselves and their personality characteristics of shyness and silence. All these situations in the above extracts call for a need to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* by encouraging the rise of women in society. Saudi women lack of experience in being visible and participating in decision making means a lack of *Tamkeen*, as these two factors are components of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* in Saudi Arabian society. As a result of the social status of women, even the women themselves do not believe in the importance of distinguishing themselves in the public sphere. Participants do not usually plan for this side of things; they simply want to be able to work in the professions. However, Saudi women care about their quality of work; by relying on their effort and qualifications to be visible in the professional world.

The next section analyses how Saudi women build reputations, which also reflects *Tahmeesh* in the way they hide their personalities and rely on the quality of their work to speak for them and build their professional reputations. Again, their status of being *Nessa' Muhamashat* affects how they build their reputations and present themselves in public.

Ways of Building Reputation

Since Saudi women are usually not recognised, their opportunities to distinguish themselves are limited, and they do not consider reputation to be something important that they need to build. Before analysing their approaches to building a reputation, this research considers how they look at themselves as brands. The research participants were asked about this question because it is vital to know whether they think of themselves as individuals, their self-knowledge, and the possibility of regarding themselves as full-fledged, independent people without considering any aspect of collective identity. Women revealed confusion and discomfort at the type of question and whether they were willing to express themselves or not. The table below presents the reactions of Saudi women to being asked about being brands. I regard the first answer or sentence from their narratives as best capturing their genuine reaction to the question.

As a brand! This is a difficult question.
I cannot tell you; it is difficult to explain
I am not a brand. I am a very simple woman.
I always read about self-marketing, trying to gain experience; I mean, every time I convince myself of its importance.
I do not promote myself to others because I don't like to talk about myself.
I feel that, even now, I haven't fully discovered myself. I cannot answer your question.
Me as a brand? It is a difficult question. This question is good but difficult.
I do not know how to start describing myself. It is very difficult; I am not used to it.
I have never tried to build my name. I am always reluctant to be a well-known person.
I do not know; I do not know, how I can explain?
This is what I could not do, but my boss called me the Joker, so I am the Joker at work.
Honestly, I don't like to see myself as a great person; people will say, "she is arrogant."
A very deep question: I always feel that I am a lot of things and not one thing.
Honestly, I have never thought about myself as a brand; I am very spontaneous.
I had never thought about this question.
I hate this point. I believe that people cannot describe themselves. Others are the ones who are supposed to describe, and talk about, a person.
Tough question. A problem when I speak; how do you want me to explain myself? The most important product in my life.

5.2: The immediate answer of asking the participants about being a brand

When Saudi women were asked how they looked at themselves as brands, most of their answers revealed a shock at even asking such a question. Their reactions emphasise three main outcomes. First, their feeling and perception of being brands surfaces in ways in which they like the question but did not know how to answer it; participants regarded the question as

difficult, deep, or tough, but it was still a good question. Second, their self-knowledge and awareness of their personal qualities.; on the one hand, women who know themselves criticised the question and then talked about their preferences for distinguishing themselves. On the other hand, some women struggled with the meaning of themselves as brands. They struggled to find an appropriate answer to this question, as they have been raised to always consider their collective identity, their "we-ness" (Snow, 2001), when expressing themselves. The third outcome involves women's realisation of the importance of this type of question and their experience in answering it – or not answering it. Saudi women realise that they had not thought about themselves as distinguished women before considering their reputations and ways to build it. They had not realised the importance of looking at themselves as brands with distinctive characteristics that help build a professional identity. The Saudi women who have had the experience or realisation of distinguishing themselves express a preference for looking at themselves as brands, whether they like to do that or not. The research participants admitted their avoidance of talking about themselves as independent agents because of the nature of the society they live in, their childhood as Saudi girls, and their status as women in a veiled society. However, even in segregated communities where there are only women, they do not usually show themselves as brands. Saudi women do not praise the quality of their own work or introduce themselves in ways that promote its distinctiveness, which is a kind of *Tahmeesh* of the self, and concentrate on the quality of their work. After long years of hard work, they will become distinctive and have brands in their professional communities. This is made clear by analysing their ways of building reputations and their perceptions of that process.

In the everyday lives of Saudi women, they are responsible for being an ideal Islamic woman: good daughters, good wives, and perfect mothers (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019; Pharaon, 2004). In professional communities, their behaviours and communications consider sociocultural norms and societal expectations; women are always protecting the reputations

and names of their families and husbands. For Saudi women and in Saudi Arabian society, the term 'reputation' is not something to be built or planned for, but something to save and protect. Saudi women must always protect their reputation by following the notion of ideal Islamic woman in their lifestyles and communications. They protect their own reputations to protect their families' honour and reputations. As Pharaon (2004) suggests:

> Family honor and good reputation—or the reverse, shame—rests mainly on the public behavior of women, thereby reinforcing the high degree of sex segregation in the society. This is often greatly at odds with the realities of women's lives and aspirations (pp. 361- 362).

Therefore, in constructing a professional identity, talking about distinguishing oneself, building a reputation, and looking at oneself as a brand is unusual for Saudi women. All their efforts regarding reputation used to involve saving themselves and their reputations by meeting societal expectations and not acting in ways that are strange for Saudi women to act. In their identity formation, Saudi women do not traditionally consider the kind of reputation that requires trying to be well known in one's profession or showing one's qualities and achievements; their sociocultural and gendered background puts strict rules on women in society and expects them to be shy and avoid public exposure (Song, 2019).

Saudi women replace the actions of introducing and talking about themselves to construct a professional identity with the idea that the quality of their work is enough to tell who they are, which ignores the fact that quality of work needs a long time to appear and be well understood in any profession. As a result of the sociocultural rules and status of women in Saudi Arabia, women in this research have not been given serious consideration to planning to become well known as people. There are many needs, wants, and goals to be achieved before they realise the importance of building a reputation. For Saudi women, reputation is something that happens to them; it is not something they build. It is a result of the quality of their work,

of first impressions related to that quality of work and their specialty or qualifications. Participants did not talk about their efforts to build a reputation by relying on personal identity or personal characteristics due to their sense of having long been *Nessa' Muhamashat*. Some Saudi women in this research consider women who use their personal characteristics and show their personalities by distinguishing themselves and being visible as taking a shortcut to the promotion and as not being capable, as illustrated by Hussah:

> I am a professional woman; I have my job and I am thinking of a reputation to be built, so I will work hard to the point where I do not need to introduce myself. Everyone will hear about me: "There is an engineer named Hussah." I'm taking it the tough way; I'm not taking it the easy way. Because since I started working, I know there are girls who take it the easy way. I mean, there are women who talk nicely with managers, chatting and laughing, and suddenly we see her become a manager. How? We don't know. I'm building a reputation, not building relationships. I'm building a career, so this is my mission. Other than that, I don't care.

Women consider talking about or promoting themselves to be appropriate. Some Saudi women have not been used to talking or being visible in public since their childhood as it is a mindset they grow up with and automatically deploy in their professional lives. The key is to avoid social *'ayb*, which translates to shame (Altorki, 1986, p. 54); talking about yourself and being open to communicating with strangers in public is a violation of the modesty code in Saudi Arabia. It is behaviour that brings *'ayb* on the women who engage in it. Therefore, Saudi women in their identity construction avoid any actions that will bring *'ayb* onto their reputations, resulting in the social stigma that makes them worry (Altorki, 1986). Participants work on saving their reputations from being misjudged rather than building reputations for branding themselves or having distinctive professional identities. Most of the women in this research rely on the quality of their work to say who they are and describe their capabilities.

This practice hides their existence as people and makes them invisible, supporting their status as *Nessa' Muhamashat* in Saudi Arabian society.

For Saudi women to challenge the social norms and have agency beyond their usual behaviour, they need support from male guardians and subsequently society will accept her accomplishment and will not consider her to be engaging in *'ayb* behaviour. As Altorki (1986) states, "while it is the women who often initiate change, their behaviour becomes acceptable only if backed by the authority of husband, father, or brother, who enforce the social norms" (p. 71).

The next section of the analysis reveals a special case in the narratives of Saudi women and their conservative society: the idea that the more conservative society is, the easier it is to distinguish oneself as women.

Becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* in a Conservative, Masculine Society

Being *Nessa' Muhamashat* is a result of a conservative, male-dominated society because of the restrictions women face and the authority that men wield. However, the present study found an unexpected result of this situation: the more a society is conservative and dominated by men, the easier it is to become distinguished for Saudi women. Enabling women in society relies on the support of their families and guardians, as explained above. When families press against society's norms and support women to success, eventually all of society will celebrate their success. The following extracts express this experience. Najd explains the benefit of being in masculine society that helped easily to become distinguished due to the lake of well-known women:

> What has distinguished women in our society is that our community is masculine. In other words, men are the deciders in our community, so when

> women like you and I accomplish something, we will be distinguishable from other women. People will be astonished at what women have done. I feel that Allah has granted us women features such as additional encouragement and support. I used to hear that women are oppressed and not given their rights! But that was wrong! Women are supported and encouraged.

Furthermore, in Salwa's view being in Qassim region is helpful in reaching professional goals:

> I feel that being in this time served me, this scarcity served me; being a woman in this field, in Saudi Arabia, in Qassim, this very conservative society, helped me a lot in my work.

The professional Saudi women who explain these experiences of building reputation are aware of the scarcity of distinguished women in their society. They express this point of view from their personal experience, without considering the support of their families and guardians. However, looking at the case from the *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen Almara'ah* angle shows that these women are supported by families and guardians and that this support guided them to have a positive reputation in Saudi Arabian society. Conservativism makes it easier to become well known and successful due to the scarcity of such women, while collectivism results in rapid fame, as society views successful women as the pride of all. In Saudi Arabia every personal achievement for the Saudi women is an achievement for society. Thus, Saudi Arabian society has opened to accepting women who are *Mumaknat* and supporting women who are moving from *Tahmeesh* to *Tamkeen.* However, first, women need to challenge societal norms by having supportive families or guardians. Moreover, changes in Saudi Arabia and the reform of the status of women enable *Tamkeen Almara'ah*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, analysing the ways in which Saudi women become *Nessa' Mumaknat* opened the door to interpreting the concept of women's empowerment, which – in a Middle Eastern context – is best termed *Tamkeen Almara'ah*. Saudi women have been navigating the sense of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* in their online and offline identity construction. Their need to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* has been revealed in many examples and in different ways. In addition, changes in Saudi Arabia, especially regarding the status of women and the rise of women in more areas of society, have supported and validated the possibilities of women becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat.*

Chapter 6: Reforming professional femininity: From 'We' as a collective identity to 'We' as change-makers

Introduction

The data analysis demonstrates the profound impact of women's cultural, social and gender backgrounds on their construction of the online professional identities. The intensive interpretation of the findings regarding Saudi women reveals that it is critical to consider the professional femininity of Saudi women.

The research findings as to sociocultural identity work doing online personal branding on LinkedIn (chapter 4) and the women's need to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* in society (chapter 5) have revealed the professional femininity of these Saudi women. Analysing the research findings related to ideal Islamic woman and the status of Saudi women shows that the form of the modern Saudi women appears in women's narratives and their performance of professional identity construction. It expresses the voice of women, mindset, and attitudes to being in a profession. Analysing the previous two chapters revealed the need to revise femininity in its professional context due to these women's need to have a professional identity considering the recent changes for women's role in Saudi Arabian society. Saudi women need to frame a professional identity from their experience by considering their history, realities, needs and desires. Identity work through personal branding acts as a tool to shape the identity of Saudi women in a professional context; through this creation, the need to reform Saudi women's femininity appears in a modern version that is proportional to the changes in the status of women in Saudi Arabian society.

The foundation of Saudi women being change-makers

The research findings present the interviewed women as change-makers in Saudi Arabian society, but they are change-makers in a way that relates to and respects their background. This role results from the ideology regarding Islamic women that governs the lifestyle of Saudi women, the history of women's status in Saudi Arabia, and the sociocultural attributes of Saudi Arabian society. In answering the questions of who they are, what they want to become, and how to reach that goal, Saudi women have reflected in their professional identity construction the meaning of being change-makers. Research participants talk about how they create their own realities with due consideration of the impacts of their cultural, social, and gender background. Saudi women have practice at manoeuvring to reach their goals and live their lives. They benefit by adopting attitudes or dealing with specific matters in life while always considering the collective, conservative, and masculine culture in which they live. Studies of Saudi women have revealed this meaning in many situations and experiences. For instance, to overcome the mobility and gender segregation rules, Saudi women take higher education courses online to gain up-to-date research knowledge, practice critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and have the opportunity to communicate with other students, male and female, from different cultures (Szilagyi, 2015). Saudi women also choose to work to go out and craft an autonomous lifestyle that distinguishes them from their relatives. Despite low wages, women work in the private sector as a way of rising to another, more mobile lifestyle and to gain the self-awareness they need to project themselves into professional femininity models "which they could define themselves as autonomous individuals vis-à-vis their families" (Le Renard, 2014, p. 72). Another example of Saudi women being change-makers is gaining their *Tamkeen* and offering other Saudi women *Tamkeen* through entrepreneurship, since it enables freedom, autonomy and empowerment, as Alkhaled and Berglund (2018) note:

> These empowering practices guided the women towards self-employment and "freedom" for themselves as well as decent employment for other women. The women felt energised by empowering other women through employing them in their enterprises, and this led them to mobilise a movement for social and structural change for women in their country (p. 889).

Through their lifestyles, Saudi women promote the meaning of 'there is always a way' in gaining recognition, mobility, and existence, all while keeping their sociocultural realities in mind as they live their lives. They never consider emancipation as a need to reach their goals but always work and rely on their self-development and self-awareness to change and reform their realities (Le Renard, 2014). These women have and accept the responsibility to change, in the process of which they consider other Saudi women and offer them opportunities to improve their own lives and realities (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018). This approach offers an opportunity to identify change-makers in the context of Saudi women.

The definition of change-makers was grounded and developed from the data. Change-makers as Saudi women are the women who are ambitious and aware of their self-worth, values, and personal characteristics while they consider the notion of the ideal Islamic woman. The traditional image of Saudi women is part of their heritage in their efforts to change society and satisfy their professional wants and needs. They are working on their self-development and studying to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* and be visible and successful, even – perhaps especially – in public. In their process of changing, they are innovative and think about other women, seeking to inspire them and offer them the opportunities to overcome societal restrictions and difficulties. They are loyal to their country and want to be part of its development system.

النساء صانعات التغيير:

هن نساء طموحات واعيات بقيمتهن الذاتية وخصائصهن الشخصية في ذات الوقت يأخذن في عين الاعتبار نموذج المرأة المسلمة والصورة الاصيلة للمرأة السعودية كإرث ومغذٍ في تحركاتهن نحو التغيير

وفي اشباع حاجاتهن ورغباتهن المهنية، يعملن من أجل تطوير ذواتهن ويتعلمن من اجل ان يصبحن نساء ممكنات، بارزات، وناجحات في مجتمعاتهن. في سعيهن للتغيير هن مبتكرات وملهمات، دائما يأخذن بعين الاعتبار النساء الاخريات لإلهامهن وتوفير الفرص لهن للتغلب على صعوبات المجتمع. هن نساء يشعرن بالولاء لدولتهن ودائماً على استعداد ليكن جزءاً من منظومة التغيير والتطوير في المملكة العربية السعودية.

The research findings express how women deal with and overcome online tensions to form a professional identity, to move from *Tahmeesh* to *Tamkeen*, and finally become change-makers by modifying the notion of the ideal Islamic woman for a professional context; they also suggest a specific form of appearance that is appropriate for being professional Saudi women. The interviewed women work to represent their ways of living their lives through their collective identity – the 'we' consideration – but at the same time plan for a future they want to see, and this chapter shows that they carry out what Le Renard calls the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (2014, p. 113). The sections below explain how Saudi women are reforming professional femininity by becoming change-makers in Saudi Arabian society.

The reforming initiatives appeared to be a personal responsibility of the women themselves, in three main aspects. First is their admission and recognition of and coexistence with the traditional status of Saudi women, which reveals their awareness and affiliation with Saudi women's collective identity, 'we'. Second is their efforts to modify the status of women in society by reflecting on their evolving reality and expressing their self-dialogues on recent changes in the status of women in Saudi Arabia. The third is the construction of their professional identities. This section analyses these aspects to reveal professional femininity of Saudi women.

Narrative of traditional status of Saudi women

The status of women in Saudi Arabian society in their experience of constructing identity in real life reflects the major role that this status has played in their behaviour and

attitudes towards explaining who they are. Questioning their methods of constructing professional identities as Saudi women revealed how being 'Saudi women' impacts on their ways of building personal brands by mentioning the traditional status of Saudi women, which is associated with the ideal Islamic woman. The participants' narrative of the traditional status does not rise to a complete subordination to its ideology, yet they consider respect and even compliance. The women's narratives regarding the traditional status of Saudi women appears in different forms. Douaa's narrative explains the high pressure on women from society:

> Society as a whole causes social pressure on women, from the family, from what people may say, from the stereotype of Saudi women that they should not be visible on social media or should not leave their house. Many families are conservative and, even now, they deal with women that way. Even families that are open-minded fear for daughters from conservative families, and what else they can say about their daughters. I feel society is the biggest obstacle to women's distinguishing themselves.

On the other hand, Samma on her distinguished identity as online gamer she explained her way of considering the traditional status of women:

> In my daily life I am an online gamer. I'm a Saudi gamer girl on the internet, so I know how to deal with it, and I don't mind dealing with a girl or a boy. I don't mind. It's the same for me. But when I talk about the reality here, the Saudi people, the Arab people in general, sometimes they're like, "Oh she is too different from Saudis." This situation worries me a lot because I don't want anyone to have a bad idea about me. Even my female colleagues who are different from me, I do not want them to look at me and make me feel that I am different or think that I crossed the line as a Saudi woman.

The impact of the traditional status of Saudi women revealed the narratives of interviewees. It was an obstacle to their distinguishing themselves in professions, making them leery of creating their own professional pathways and causing them to worry about showing

their accomplishments and difference from other Saudi women. Women in the research are concerned about the notion of the ideal Islamic woman (Doumato, 1992) not because they want to follow it but because they worry about not meeting societal expectations and that people will talk about them, affecting the reputations of themselves, their families, or their guardians. In general, Saudi women reflect a preoccupation with reputation in their lifestyle and a desire not to be stigmatised as backward (Le Renard, 2014). The level of associating with the ideology varied depending on generation, as older Saudi women are more closely related to the Islamic ideology regarding women. By contrast, the younger generation of women have ways of relaxing the norms they inherited, as Altorki (1986) found in studying the social world of Saudi women:

> The younger-generation women are not, of course, transgressing the limits of the norms that the society finds acceptable. They are working within the range of the acceptable, but at the same time they seem to be expanding the range of what is permissible. Thus, it may be argued these women are pursuing strategies which enhance their autonomy within the limits of the possible (pp. 120-121).

The traditional status of Saudi women appears in their narratives as part of their identity construction, but it does not shape their entire identity. Saudi women try to 'anchor the self' by being different (Thomas & Linstead, 2002) from the traditional image in their identity claims and by being strategic (Coupland, 2001) in their modification of that traditional status. They use dialogic identity work by expressing an ideology of Saudi women that provides a route for them to construct professional identities that generate meaningfulness, because identity work is "concerned with how the images and representations (physical, symbolic, verbal, textual and behavioural) become imbued with meaning and are taken as being part of one's identity" (Beech, 2008, p. 52). The extracts show how Saudi women differentiate themselves as professional from the traditional image of the Saudi women by expressing the tension inherent

in being (their kind of women) in Saudi Arabian society. They consider themselves to be professional women with careers and want to build their brands, but the basis of ideology for Saudi women could shift this belief towards being emancipated women or bad women who generate tension.

The influence of traditional status appeared for Saudi professional women in the first uses of LinkedIn, an experience that generated culture shock. The extract below shows an example of first experiences of the participants in using LinkedIn, which represent the reactions of women to being on a social media platform for professional purposes. Such experiences express their responses to the nature of LinkedIn and their feelings of being different as compared with other women (Szilagyi, 2015) because LinkedIn is unlike other social media platforms that are used for purely or at least largely social purposes. Specifically, their profile identification explains their reactions and confusion, as in Layla example:

> When I first signed up in LinkedIn, I did not understand anything, I left my account empty, I could not understand what to do! Then, I started to fill my information step by step.

Most of the participants completed their LinkedIn profile identification in two to three steps over different periods of time because the use of social media platforms for Saudi women usually does not require self-exposure. Guta and Karolak (2015) explain how Saudi women negotiate and express their identities on social media by employing different tactics such as using nicknames, hiding personal photos, and using their first name on another social media platform. However, the purposes and requirements of being on LinkedIn are different because LinkedIn is intended to help its users build a personal brand. People who use LinkedIn are expected to set up profiles with full details, adopt a formal engagement style and form an appropriate network to reach their professional goals. Being on LinkedIn for professional Saudi

women shows their lack of experience in publicly identifying themselves in a mixed-gender environment and with entirely factual and accurate information. The impressions of research participants about LinkedIn express what is called 'LinkedIn culture shock'. Aljuwaiser (2018) described a similar situation as "internet culture shock for Saudi women" (p. 7) because of Saudi Arabia's social norms.

The following section analyses the efforts of women to modify the ideal Islamic woman by incorporating a professional identity.

The reform initiatives of professional femininity

Part of the status of Saudi women is their reality and experience in professions. The data clearly shows how the women talked about and explained women's status as Saudi professionals. Their narrative reflects their awareness and critical view of the effort that women in professions need to be successful and distinctive due to the Saudi ideology that dim the visibility of professional women. Sociocultural norms and social rules have shaped the professional status of Saudi women. Societal expectations, families, and guardians (as in Chapter 4) all play a role in dictating what it means to be Saudi professional women. However, the situation is getting better, due both to the efforts of women and the reformation of the Saudi monarchy regarding the status of women. On the one hand, the women in their narrative express their thoughts and actions geared to critiquing and modifying their status. On the other hand, new hopes and outlooks appeared in their self-dialogues after the Saudi government-initiated reforms. Thus, analysing interviewee narrative gives a clear indication of their reforming initiatives and evidence that professional femininity does not conform with traditional Islamic ideology about women.

This section analyses both women's narratives of what it looks like to be professional women in Saudi Arabia and what these women said to themselves after reforming their professional status. Asking research participants their approaches to constructing professional identities and introducing themselves in their professions led to other aspects that shed light on the realities and revealed the meaning of being professional Saudi women. The answers were a mix of reflections, critiques, and plans for action, showing the responsibilities of women to modify professional femininity.

In addition, Saudi women's self-identity has not been publicly visible or recognised for a long time, as Ghala stated:

> I always introduce myself by saying my name and my work as a businesswoman even though a large part of society is still close-minded regarding how women should identify themselves. The older generation, especially, prevents women from saying their names and showing their personalities, particularly in mixed-gender situations. In Qassim women are usually not asked about their names and, if that does happen, the question would be, "Shall I call you, Om…?", "Mother of …" or "What is the name of your son?" If saying the name is still not common, so showing our characteristics as women is harder than you think.

It is common for traditional Saudi women not to use their own names when introducing themselves in public or when they are asked about their names. They usually use their oldest son's name instead of their actual name; if women are not married, they use their father's name. For example, "Mother of Mohamad" (أم محمد) would be used by a mother. It is also a result of masculine society's naming women not with their real names but using fathers' or sons' names. This way of introducing the self, which is part of forming an identity and saying who one is, was common in Saudi Arabian society and appears in the women's narratives presented in this study. The participants explained it as an example of *Tahmeesh Almara'ah* practices that need

to be stopped. They criticised the practice by excluding themselves from partaking in it, either online or in real life, showing their need to use and take pride in their full names in public. Moreover, the findings show the effort women must undertake in the professional community to raise their visibility and attain their professional goals. For many generations, Saudi women's traditional status has presented women as *Nesaa' Muhamashat*, which required them to work twice as hard to be acknowledged in professional communities (Al-Hussain & Al-Marzooq, 2016).

Since Saudi Arabian society is collectivist, conservative and masculine, the roles of men and women are also divided. As stated above, the popular image of Saudi women is as private objects (Lipsky, 1959) who are good housewives and mothers. The active role is only for the men in the family. This description of the masculine model places the responsibility on men to work and offer a good life to their family members. Because of that, when women work and have this responsibility by becoming active, visible, well known, and successful on their own, they may be regarded as masculine. To clarify, Le Renard (2014) describes the situation as follows:

> The hegemonic model of masculinity for Saudi men – that is, the criteria according to which they are judged good, respectable, responsible men – relies notably on their capacity to support a family and to "protect" women from exposing themselves to the world of paid employment, considered as degrading; this constitutes a source of national distinction (p. 73).

Due to the model of masculinity in professions, for Saudi women professional femininity has simply been invisible. Some women in this study regard being professional as a masculine characteristic that strips women of their femininity, as in Najla's narrative:

> One of the things that annoys me is disregarding the achievements of women; this is society's perspective... I see it in people's eyes when they see a woman

> talking about her accomplishments; they consider her a broad-minded or rude woman. They have a negative attitude towards this woman, that she is masculine and does not have emotions. They also might ask how she accepts herself in this way. Some people believe that men have roles in life that are inherently different from women's roles. As I said earlier, they consider women's achievements to be weird; why do they think so? Do they think that we cannot do anything in life?

Layan compared expectations of women in Saudi Arabian society as needing to be "like an octopus" to achieve their professional goals as she said:

> It becomes difficult for a woman to come out of her shell in society because she feels a sense of imperfection. That may not come from her family but the external community, which has put the woman in a situation where she wants to prove herself all the time. She learns, works and studies. I always describe a Saudi woman like an octopus because society dictates that she should be a good wife and mother, a good housewife, an excellent worker, and perfect in social relations. It is very difficult to meet all these demands. On the other hand, see what is required of men; society does not even require a man to be a householder and a good husband.

While Reema showed in her example the needs for the participant to approve themselves:

> I feel that Saudi women expend twice the effort to approve themselves; we want to show the whole world that we are strong and successful.

Reema demonstrated the realisation of the need for women to change the traditional status and be ready to become professional women. In a way, Saudi women modify their status in professional context following two key concepts: *ayb/dhanb* and *ghadab/rida*, to renegotiate their privileges as Altorki (1986) states:

> As might be expected, the strategies have been limited by the working of the sets of key concepts, *'ayb/dhanb* and *ghadab/rida*. These concepts are sanctions on behaviour which, because they apply over a wide range of situations, are variously interpreted. People have the latitude to turn them around and stress different nuances of meaning to accord with their perceived advantage (P. 95).

These concepts govern the women's ways of life and communication, and sociocultural norms and society attribute '*ayb* (shame), impacting the existence of women. Doing the '*ayb/ dhanb* affects women's reputation. For example, society considered that saying their name in public was '*ayb*; it was better not to do it because women are private creatures. Therefore, being in a profession does not conform with or fit the ideology regarding ideal Islamic women. The women interviewed here are exerting enormous efforts into reaching their professional goals and gaining visibility. Being in a conservative, collectivist and masculine society has encouraged them to follow a particular way of forming their professional femininity model. Aiming to achieve greater individuality for the purpose of self-development, they create professional femininity for Saudi women, as is apparent in the extracts below. The interviewed women were asked about their self-dialogue: what did they say to themselves? How did they look at themselves in the light of country changes as professionals? The women were very open to sharing their views, expressing themselves as professionals, and reflecting on their experiences. There was a high level of responsibility regarding changes and a willingness to be part of changes in a positive way.

Through women's self-dialogue about reforms, it becomes clear who these professional Saudi women are. Their self-dialogue reflects a level of appreciation from the younger generation to previous generations of women as Nadiah said:

> Changes give us powerful opportunities. I must not forget the professional women before us, the women who worked on themselves; I must admit that many girls in our society suffered for a long time, whether from their parents or society, to simply get a job. I will never forget this thing. I am very optimistic about the future, but what worries me is that we forget how the women before us made a great effort and worked to develop themselves in order to reach their professional goals. Personally, these changes gave me many opportunities and opened-up many fields for me, especially since the presence of women at conferences and workshops increased and became essential in order for society to quickly get used to the presence of women in professional life.

Participants also clarify the extent to which women care about their self-development, their level of responsibility towards themselves, their reality as in Haya extract:

> It is getting better, but I will not rely on the situation. I have to rely on myself to find my way, as I have to develop communication skills. I have to know how to deal with people, whether they are men or women.

Reema, as well as many other women, showed an intense loyalty to Saudi Arabia:

> I see myself as part of Vision 2030, and I can be the person I aspire to be and try to participate in achieving the vision through my specialization.

The research findings reveal the quest of women for *Tamkeen* and indicate their reactions as initiatives for reform. Their recognition of the scale of opportunities that have recently opened is evidence of their awareness and readiness to exploit them in a way that serves their development. Women in this study are willing to express their capabilities and positive feelings about themselves and society. The changes act like sunshine to them as they explain their personal plans to reach their professional goals.

The analysis explains the women's reform efforts as to the ideology of the ideal Islamic woman in a professional context. Both the expression of being professional women in a collectivist, conservative and masculine society, and the self-dialogue of professional women regarding reforming traditional status serve as initiatives to modify the model of professional femininity.

Toward an ideal model of femininity: becoming change-makers in a professional context

In their professional identity construction, the women in this research have shown their approaches to dealing with the ideology of the ideal Islamic woman. Since this ideology has no connection with the professional context, the narratives of these women reflect the impact of their cultural, social, and gendered background. The research findings explain identity performance through their identity negotiation and willingness to deal with or try to relax societal norms. Professional identity performance is governed by their need to modify traditional status of women, which leads to a new model: professional ideal femininity. The women need to be visible, public, and professional, and this need has encouraged them to overcome the tensions of the sociocultural rules of their background. The women established ways to deal with these rules to ensure they benefited from being in a profession. For example, in their online engagement and networking, they initiate professional connections with men online despite the gender segregation they live with in their daily lives.

Professional communication is steered by taking responsibility, as Saudi women, for setting boundaries regarding their appearance and communicating with professional men. These women showed how to deal with the sociocultural rule of veiling while needing to have a visual identity for personal branding because they must deal with sociocultural tensions and

avoid misunderstandings that might arise when being visible in a professional context. The interviewees explained their practices in the profession and the way they deal with sociocultural rules. Their mindset allows them to understand their professional requirements and combine them with their status as Saudi women to form a model of ideal professional femininity. Being on a professional platform or in a profession makes women play by their own rules to reach career goals while dealing with sociocultural norms. The finding explained the need for women to believe in themselves in the identity construction process. As Soha explained:

> At first, Saudi women should believe in themselves, know their aspirations and what they can do. Second, they must trust in their abilities, and then they will become whatever they want. Despite the difficulties we face in our community, the stereotypical image about us starts to vanish. Yes, because it was a trend in our community, women were prevented from holding higher positions. Now, things have changed, and the community trusts women. Because there are supports for women, the situation is now much better. I think culture has a role.

As well as relaxed sociocultural rules by avoiding *'ayb* situations and the gender segregation rule. Many participants say, "because it is professional" that they could communicate, talk, or network with men without being misunderstood. They are responsible for setting the communication boundaries with men by determining communication and not leaving it to chance. As Hana explained about the importance of being serious in communication on LinkedIn:

> The best thing on LinkedIn is to be serious and clear; it is a professional platform, not for entertainment, so being serious would make you stand out. We must allow communication but only in a limited way, in a professional manner, so we can get job offers, not aimless chatting with friends.

Hussah showed her responsibility for setting boundaries in professional platform:

> Society tries to adapt and accept the changes, but the primary responsibility is on women; they must deal with each society according to its characteristics. They must know who they are dealing with. What is their mentality and social background? How do they think? It is the woman who must be responsible for setting boundaries in transactions and communication, and transactions must be respectful of women.

These examples explain who these Saudi women are and how they are willing to change their reality and make it suitable for professions. Having their own professional experiences or looking at the experiences of other Saudi women allowed them to find a way to be professional with due consideration of their social, cultural, and gendered background. Regarding Saudi Arabia's collectivist, conservative and masculine society, the women are aware of the importance of being confident and relying on themselves in professional situations. Due to the ideology of ideal Islamic women, when women are in professions, they are different than in their traditional status, so they need to believe in themselves and rely on their abilities to reach their professional goals. The findings show how being in professional condition is a chance to overcome sociocultural tensions and adopt new forms of existence and communication by the women themselves, setting boundaries to avoid any misunderstandings or reactions that might affect their reputations or families. This form of existence for Saudi women expresses Altorki (1986) claim that, in seeking to improve their positions, Saudi women must still adhere to many cultural norms and adopt various strategies to reformulate some of the norms to expand their autonomy. Interpreting the ideology and developing strategies to modify that ideology in the long run is the appropriate way for women to be in professions. This understanding and development explain why women feel that they are responsible for putting limits on their communication in a professional context.

Another strategic solution that women discuss in this research to overcome sociocultural rules and find ways to construct a professional brand is how they deal with their visual identity. Since veiling is a key sociocultural rule in Saudi Arabian society, having a visual identity when doing online personal branding on LinkedIn was a common concern in their identity performance and their narratives about that performance. Analysing chapter four shows how a personal photo appeared to be a cause of tension for the women in many situations, whether those who could put their photo online but did not or those who could not, because they cover their faces. The research findings show the ways women deal with the requirement of visual identity, whether online or in real life, for professional purposes. When these groups of participants were asked about their personal photo and the experience of using it, and how they formed a visual identity for personal branding, all women agreed on the importance of putting a personal photo online on LinkedIn or in real life for professional purposes. Women talked about three ways of presenting visual identity. The first was putting up a photo, whether a clear one or from an angle that did not show the face clearly, as Hind explained:

> I have a personal logo and I meant to design it in Arabic letters to reflect my Arab identity. On my LinkedIn profile, though, I put my photo, but a photo from an angle that shows my professional specialty (fashion design) and not my face. Through the picture, I am not saying, 'See how I look'. They will see me while I am working, and I am now a fashion designer. I do not like to show my face; the best move is to show my work. I have the belief that showing my work is more important than my face. For a start, I like to play with the feelings of the audience. I like the sense of excitement and mystery. Of course, customs and traditions influenced my preference not to clearly show my face so as not to bother my extended family, even though my husband and my parents accept the idea, but for me I feel that the sense of mystery in my visual identity is a good idea at the beginning of my career.

The second was putting up a personal logo, whether it was specifically designed for LinkedIn or for professional communication online and in real life. Samma stated:

> I use my personal logo everywhere, even in my WhatsApp photo. I designed it in a way that expresses me; I wanted to have one image represent me everywhere. I am now in the process of building an identity for myself, but I'm still figuring it out; I did the logo and I'm proud of it. I want the logo to be with me until I'm 45 and starting my own business. I can see the shy girl of today, the girl who made her logo 20 years ago and has now started her own business. I can see it coming through, I'm excited for this future, and I'm trying very hard to turn it into reality.

The third was putting up a photo that expressed and reflected their interests, achievements, profession, or beliefs like Ghala, who used her business logo:

> When I registered on LinkedIn, the account picture was empty; I could not put up my personal photo because I wear niqab in my hometown, so it was out of the question that I put up my photo. After a while, I updated my profile as a businesswoman and put my business logo on the profile.

Most of the women who put up a personal photo on LinkedIn said they put it on their profile for a short time and then removed it. When I asked them why, they said, "Society is not ready yet". Therefore, in response to the sociocultural rules of veiling, women represent their visual identity professionally so that they do not lose the opportunity to show themselves. Their behaviours, attitudes, and norms are, thus, based on social and cultural values.

Online personal branding practices in a Saudi context

Research into the online personal branding phenomenon has become very popular in recent years, with a significant increase in empirical studies. It is important to distinguish personal branding from personal brand terminology. Personal branding is a strategy to form a

personal presentation (Gorbatov et al., 2018). This section discusses the online personal branding practices of Saudi women based on their identity work on LinkedIn. Those practices emerged from interpreting the tensions, the feelings of women about those tensions, and their strategies for overcoming them (see Chapter 4). Online personal branding for Saudi women is a continuous process. It is not fixed; women update their LinkedIn profiles based on their experiences of using the platform and advances in their professional lives (Al Eid, 2015). The research findings explain four personal branding practices in the Saudi sociocultural context; see Figure 6.1.

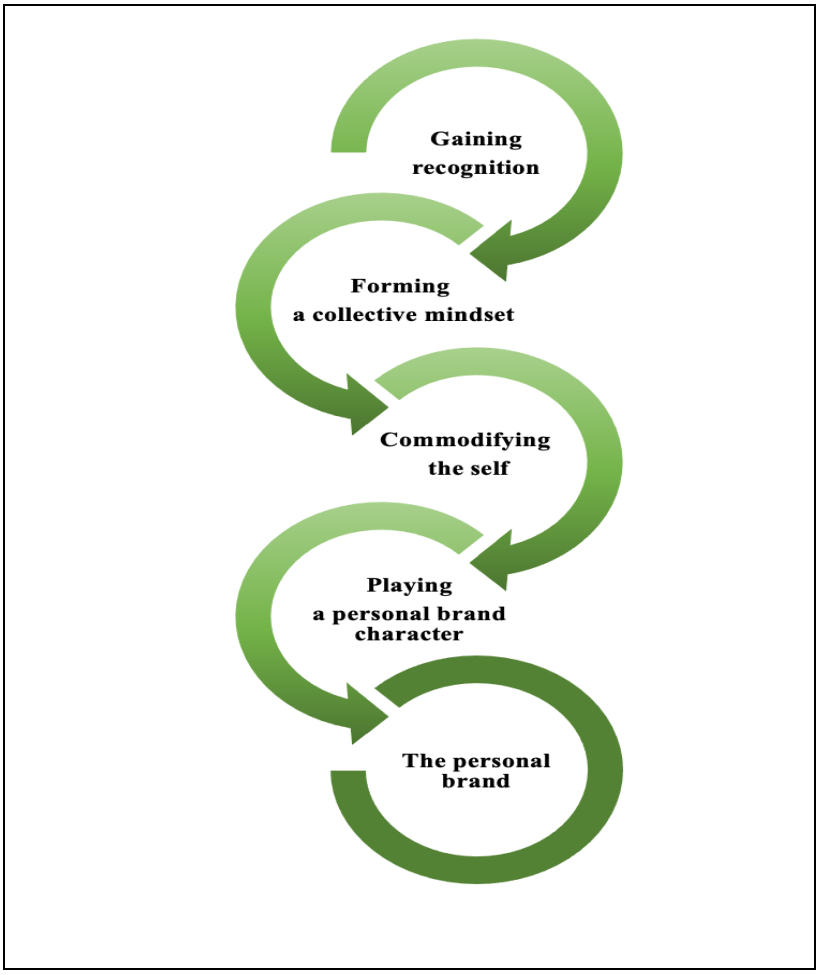


Figure 6.1: Online personal branding practices for Saudi women

The first practice in branding themselves professionally, is to 'gain recognition'; this is shown in their first attempt when signing in because it is a professional platform. These women

consider their first impressions and confront and navigate online tensions in relation to their realities as women from Saudi Arabia's collectivist, conservative and masculine culture, and society. Jawaher for example illustrates how gaining recognition through sake of professional communication:

> I signed up for LinkedIn for the sake of professional communication. I was surprised that almost nobody in my area was using it: only three other people and me.

Reema explained her ways of gaining recognition:

> I entered my basic information; after a while, I understood what I should write because I had been confused as to what to write. It was not easy at all! I answered all the questions, and if I could not answer, I left it for the next day. I explored some other accounts; I wanted to see how summaries were written in a professional way.

The second practice is 'forming a collective mindset' based on their perspective about the platform, their sociocultural norms, and their professional needs. This mindset arose from their perceptions of 'we' in branding themselves instead of 'me' as part of the long process of constructing and reconstructing their professional identity by balancing the expectations of society and wants and needs of women. Such mindset shows women's ways of negotiating, managing, and working on identity. For example, in terms of identifying their profiles, women removed a personal photo after they tried to use it because they felt Saudi Arabian society was not ready for this kind of public existence; like Douaa:

> I feel that one day I will put my personal photo on LinkedIn again. I do believe that my face is part of my identity, which is why I feel my account is not complete. This is also pressuring me; it is contradictory for me not to show my real identity in order not to be misjudged by people.

Another made her profile private after it had been public because of surveillance. An example is how they made connections and formed networks step by step over different periods of time to understand the most suitable form of branding themselves professionally as a new practice, Hanna explained:

> I am trying to distinguish myself, but my activity with LinkedIn accounts is limited; I always ask myself whether or not I have to congratulate that person for his promotion! I said no, it is not useful. It is a waste of my time to congratulate everybody on LinkedIn. Selectively picking my contacts and the fields I like have distinguished me instead of adding anybody randomly.

The Saudi women in this research need to be visible on a professional platform motivates their personal branding practices with a mindset that reflects who and what they are. Their real needs from the platform then indicate their next moves, depending on their perceptions. Even when I asked participants if they had any suggestions for suitable ways to build personal brands on LinkedIn, they stressed the importance of gaining existence and forming a collective mindset, as Nehal extract below show:

> Try to understand your community and the place you live in, what they want, and what they expect from you; you must cope with their expectations in order to reach what you want. Just go with the flow; we are in Qassim. In other cities like Riyadh, Jeddah and Damam, they are already open to the world; if you were there, you must be open-minded, and being conservative there is a big mistake.

Furthermore, Ghala suggested:

> I believe that Saudi women should highlight their names and characteristics; I believe that I should first say my full name and express my characteristics in detail. If we continue doing so, we will make progress on this matter. I believe that the name of a Saudi woman and her personal characteristics

should be shown; Saudi women should not be ashamed of introducing themselves.

In their suggestions, based on their real-life experiences and their practices in LinkedIn, Saudi women reflect the importance of gaining existence online, and these practices act as a call for their need to be visible and recognised in professional life. The presence of Saudi women on LinkedIn is evidence of their need to be visible and recognised. However, their adoption of Saudi Arabia's sociocultural norms in their branding practices is a compromise solution to cope with sociocultural tensions by forming a collective mindset that can be renewed as their professional accomplishments increase. In addition, from women's strategies of overcoming online tensions (in chapter 4), there were Saudi women who designed personal logos as an alternative to personal photos. I have used my personal logo since 2016 for the same reason; I cannot use my personal photo online, but I was really surprised when I found many of participants had personal logos that they used instead of personal photos. I did not know about the popularity of personal logo usage in the professional life of Saudi women. Even among women who can use their photo online, some participants admitted that they prefer to use a personal logo instead of a photo because of the society they live in.

The practice of using a personal logo is one example of the third practice of professional Saudi women's branding themselves: they engage in 'commodification of the self' in the way they fulfil both society's expectations and their professional needs. Commodification of the self through personal branding "invites individuals to consent to their own self-packaging all the while celebrating their sense of personal efficacy" (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005, p. 320), but Saudi women use self-commodification and packaging their professional self not just to celebrate their personal efficacy but also to cope with and overcome LinkedIn feature and sociocultural tensions. Being on a professional social media platform offers Saudi women a chance to get to know themselves in a mixed-gender professional sphere. Looking at

themselves as products is not something bad; rather, it clarifies the most suitable way to construct a professional identity. Through commodification of the self, Saudi women form a professional persona that is still associated with their cultural, social, and gendered background. This persona is formed by profile identification and engagement in networking and communication. In their self-commodification, Saudi women care deeply about how they form their professional identity on LinkedIn by looking carefully at their online self-presentation, their self-exposure, and their formation. They are profoundly aware of the importance of reflecting a professional appearance on LinkedIn. The extracts contain many examples of Saudi women's practice of self-commodification in their profile identification, networking, and engagement.

Layla considers the balance between online and real-life is important in her self-commodification:

> I must focus on my personal brand; I must be well known online, because people consider being known online very important. You must strike a balance between what you are writing online and what you have achieved in real life. In that case, you will have a strong brand.

While Hanna explained the importance of being clear and using clear language in her self-commodification:

> I listed myself and my interests, experiences and hobbies; these are useful. I tried to mention the things that convey a positive attitude about me. I tried not to mention my qualifications that much, which could be harmful or needless. I avoided the things that do not represent my identity; not everything can distinguish me. We have to be clear and use clear language in a way that does not make people think; some qualifications stop us from moving forward. I have been adding and deleting according to the current situation.

The practice of self-commodification allows professional Saudi women to reflect on themselves, their sociocultural norms, and the LinkedIn platform. They are careful about the way they are online, how they create professional personas, and their approaches to networking and communications. Their manner of self-commodification while considering their cultural, social, and gendered background is related to two processes, which Gorbatov et al. (2018, p. 9) call "needs analysis and positioning" and "constructing brand architecture" in their introduction to the key personal branding process. Through needs analysis and positioning, Saudi women define their target audience and the type of professional platform, considering their background and then positioning themselves to form an online professional persona. Then, by constructing a brand architecture, they differentiate between their desired persona and their perceived professional persona to form an ideal self, impacted by the notion of the ideal Islamic woman; that ideal self is how they want to be perceived on LinkedIn.

The final practice of online personal branding combines all three practices discussed above: 'playing a personal brand character' (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010) that meets their professional needs for a given period on LinkedIn. Participants keep constructing and reconstructing their professional identity depending on changes in their careers or in their personal perspectives.

I use the word 'character' instead of professional identity because "character is a constructed representation" (Paasonen, 2002, p. 32). Saudi women in their identity work through the three personal branding practices described above construct a character in a way that suits their online appearance. That character offers Saudi women a chance to play a role in their identity work on a professional platform by helping them understand the differences between social and professional identities as they monitor how other people respond to their profiles. Paasonen (2002) differentiates between identity and character:

> The differentiation between the terms "identity" and "character" is nothing short of crucial: whereas identity traditionally refer to the specificity of a person, of her/his personality and even inner substance, the word "character" has a double meaning as unique personality and the inner strength that define an individual, and centrally also as a constructed representation of a person) (p. 32).

The analysis shows that Saudi women play five-character types in their identity work. There are the 'mysterious women' who like to limit their self-presentation and self-exposure to appeal to their audience, same as Shahad:

> By the way, nothing enthuses people about you unless there are mysterious things; it makes us humans excited. You want to know more and more about others until you know everything. So, I think LinkedIn is a good way of branding yourself in a mysterious way; this makes people more excited because they are creating a particular image of the person, to be of a certain age, with a specific look, from a certain culture.

The 'conservative women' who follow sociocultural norms without concern for their personal preferences same as Nehal:

> You can see that I am *conservative* and not interested in a new perspective or new opportunities, and that is why I am not active on LinkedIn.

The **'**feminine women' who are afraid to be called 'masculine', same as Najla:

> Having a LinkedIn account is a challenge!! Because I was afraid of being called a masculine girl.

The 'masculine women' who want to both be a man and be perceived as tough as men. Same as Layan:

> I did not want to seem either too feminine or too masculine! I cared about not looking like a spoiled girl; I *wanted to look tough*!

Finally, the ‘sacrificed women’ who take the lead and presents their individual preferences to Saudi Arabian society to relax its sociocultural rules same as Farah:

> For me, I believe that it is good to take the lead and start changing society. I was mistreated because of my personal photo: “Why she is taking the lead?'; “She should wait until society has evolved and accepts such ideas.”

These types of women serve as evidence of the diversity of Saudi women, which comes from the various ways they relate to Saudi Arabian culture and society, the differences in their families’ level of consideration of sociocultural rules, and the collectivist and conservative levels of family and society. Saudi women in their identity work must choose the type(s) of women they want to be or become; choosing a type helps form their personal branding, considering their understanding of themselves and of the platform, by determining how they want to be perceived.

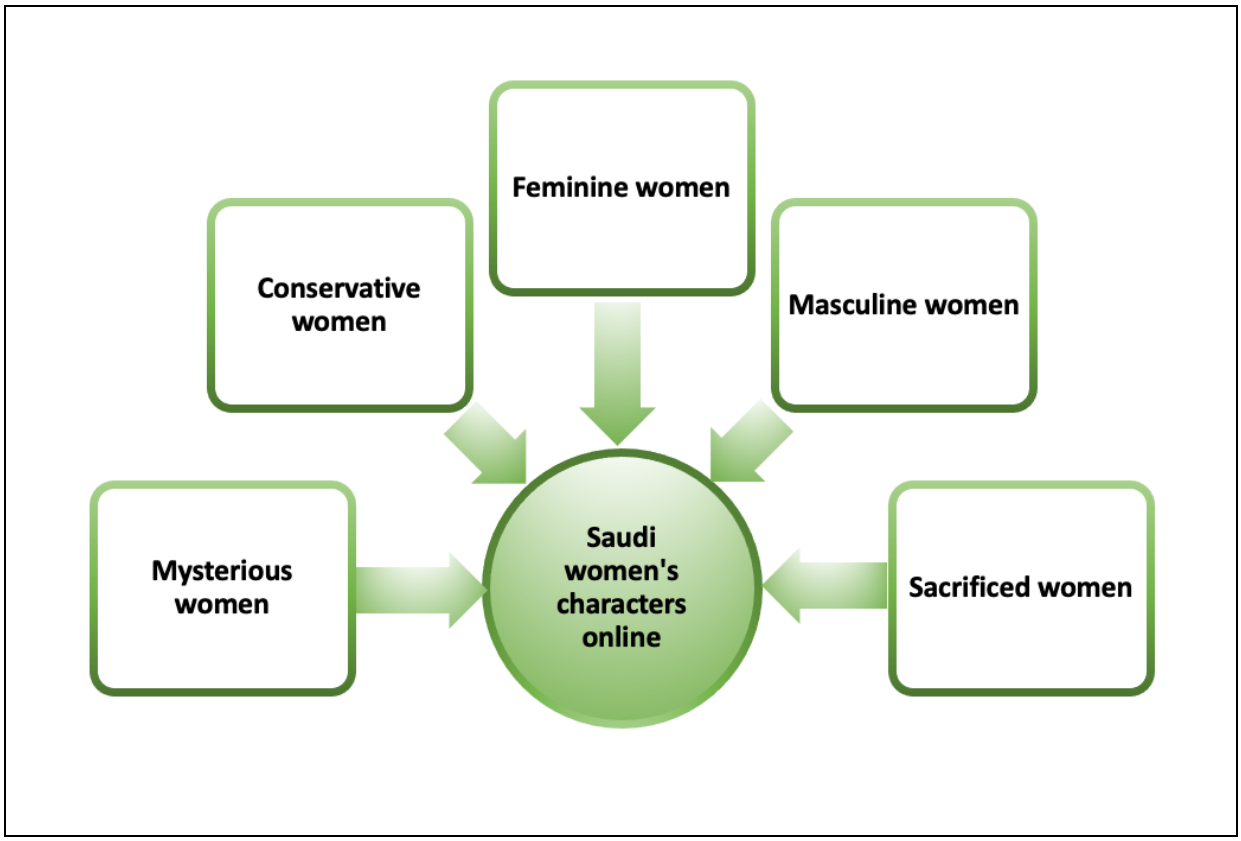


Figure 6.2: Five types of Saudi women's character in identity work during online personal branding

Some women play a character the first time they use LinkedIn to discover the platform, while others choose a character after having experience on the site. Playing a character reflects the type of women they are and appears when they adopt specific behaviours or styles of engagement to show their professional identity and being branded by actions and reactions. Saudi women use identity work as a background to their practice of playing characters to explore their possible professional selves. This is what Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) called "identity play" and means "the crafting and provisional trial of immature (i.e., yet unelaborated) possible selves" (p. 13). They play characters to form their preferred possible professional selves, as the extracts below show.

In this practice of playing characters, Saudi women activate and try the situation of having a LinkedIn account which, in my research context, means having a professional identity

and a personal brand. They are playing characters by examining their existence through whether the profile fully identifies them and by engaging in networking and communicating within the rules that they have adopted from their collective mindset. They have an overall feeling and perception about LinkedIn as a professional platform, their ideal selves in a professional setting, and the rewards for Saudi women of being in that sphere. As Nehal explained:

> I always get notification emails from LinkedIn, especially from colleagues and consultants I have worked with; I really like that, even if I do not open LinkedIn, I always get the emails. That is really cool. I feel that I still exist there, on LinkedIn. Seeing that other people are doing something there can be a motivation to revisit it and share my updates.

These personal brand characters are the product of sociocultural identity work that reflects what they want to show at this stage of their professional experiences, in full consideration of all their experiences that either facilitate or prevent professional identity construction. At the same time, through playing these characters, Saudi women discover more and more about themselves and learn more about their possible professional selves. Like in Jawaher experiences:

> LinkedIn still does not fully represent me. I am still working on my account; it is not formed yet! LinkedIn is a window by which I see people. It connected me with people, encouraged me to make plans for the future, helped me in writing my CV and gave me many ideas and suggestions.

In their online personal branding practice, Saudi women negotiate their sense of self and challenge the negative image of Saudi women through identity work and play on LinkedIn. During the interview, some research participants used the phrase “because LinkedIn is a

professional platform" many times in their narratives of building an online personal brand. As in Hala's example:

> Because it is a professional platform for professional jobs, I must show my professional identity. I always care about sharing true and correct information without any kind of manipulation; I have never mentioned a certificate that I did not have.

They choose to be on LinkedIn because it is professional. They enrol with their full names and relax some sociocultural norms because it is a professional network. During this study, it was discovered that being on a professional social media platform encouraged the women to play new identity roles on social media: a professional role as Badreah explained:

> I did not go deep on LinkedIn, but it positively motivates me**;** it gives me a feeling that I am important and must introduce myself. The reason why I signed up for LinkedIn was to tell people that this is the professional me; I have a job, and this is my position, and I am available for other opportunities.

That means using full names, networking with the opposite sex, at least for some women, and showing their real selves. This is not like their online experience on social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Aljuwaiser, 2018; Alsaggaf, 2019; Altuwayjiri, 2019; Guta & Karolak, 2015). Therefore, online personal branding practices for Saudi women begin with gaining recognition, move through forming a collective mindset and commodification of the self, and conclude by playing characters. Through these practices, Saudi women do identity work by constructing and reconstructing their professional personas.

Conclusion

The professional femininity model for Saudi women considers traditional status of women under the notion of the ideal Islamic woman as a fundamental belief that does not affect

their professional identity. The professional femininity model expresses these women's gratitude for the efforts women of previous generations have made to become professional women before the status of women began to be reformed and before their *Tamkeen* was available. The women who represent this model are authentic, responsible, and self-reliant; they work continuously on improving themselves. The Saudi women in this research are completely loyal to their country, have their own professional intentions and plans, and regard themselves as playing an important role in the development of Saudi Arabian society and realising the vision of the Kingdom for the future. They have ways to communicate and express themselves to meet societal expectations and help them reach their own professional goals. The professional femininity model introduces authentic, modern, and professional Saudi women whose attitudes make clear that they intend to be change-makers in Saudi Arabian society.

Analyses of the three chapters yielded findings that drew on the important features of Saudi women's professional identity work in a gendered sociocultural context and its dynamic impact on the women themselves. As found in Chapter Four, Saudi women's identity work on LinkedIn is driven by (1) early influences from family, society, culture, and gender, (2) professional experiences and (3) online tensions. All these features reflect the impact of collective identity on Saudi women's online personal branding and show the consideration of the 'We' as a collective identity on the professional platform. The findings of Chapter Four called for a deep interpretation of the data to explore the women's needs that make the basis of the formation of their professional identities and their having of an online personal brand. Chapter Five continues off Chapter Four and explores the identification of women's needs to move from being Nessa' Mohamashat to becoming Nessa' Mumaknat in a professional context. Saudi women consider society's ideologies and implement strategies to do redefinition tasks to reform professional femininity, as analysed in Chapter Six. Chapter Six explains the ways in which Saudi women as change-makers engage in professional identity construction as

an ongoing practice and build online personal brands in the Saudi context. All analyses found in the three chapters offer clear explanations of Saudi women's identity work, starting with 'We' as a collective identity and transitioning to 'We' as change-makers while considering their personal identity 'Me' in forming personal brands.

Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion

In this thesis, sociocultural identity work undertaken by professional Saudi women during their online personal branding on LinkedIn was analysed. This study produced a conceptual framework so researchers can better understand the important features of the analysis of identity work in a gendered sociocultural context and its impact on the ideology of women, traditional status, and professional identity construction. Figure 7.1 highlights the practices, situations, and tasks that occur within three key sociocultural framed contexts; early influences, professional experiences, and online tensions intertwine with any single identity work event through building online personal brands for professional purposes.

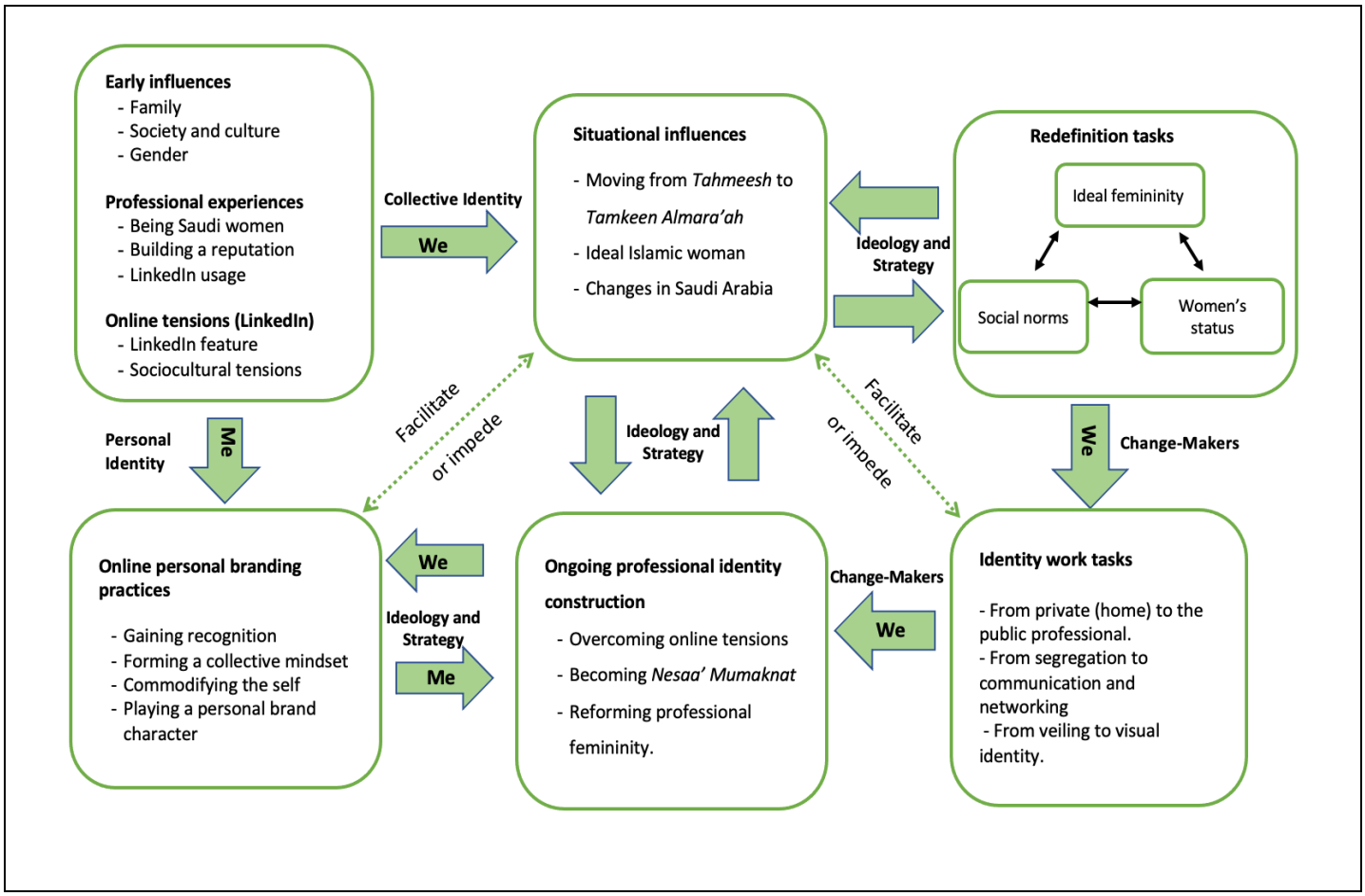


Figure 7.1: Sociocultural identity work for professional Saudi women

The figure outlines the identity work negotiation in a naturalistic identification setting when professional Saudi women want to construct a professional identity on a social media platform. Generally, identity work through online personal branding is explored through the professional women's narrative of identity construction experiences both online and in real life. The gender of women is being shaped by culture and social background and, in the online tensions of using the professional social media platform LinkedIn. Two types of identity situations steer the identity work: 'we' and 'me'; first, the collective identity considers the 'we' situation for Saudi women, such as their cultural, social, and family aspects and their traditional status as women in everyday life, all of which generated situational influences on their identity work. Second, personal identity considers the 'me' situation of each participant regarding self-knowledge, professional experiences, beliefs, attitudes, tensions, and backgrounds, all of which guide online personal branding practices. The collective identity is activated and foregrounded when professional women incorporate these attributes into their identity work with the impact of situational influences that refer to the need of women to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat*. The collective identity refers to the consideration of women and respect of the ideal Islamic woman and their actions and reactions to the changes in Saudi Arabia that relate to their status as professional women.

In the professional identity construction process, collective identity and situational influences on Saudi women act like an ideology that participates in redefinition tasks: redefining the notion of ideal femininity, redefining social norms, and redefining the status of women to generate a specific strategy for each of them. The redefinition tasks allow women to gain their *Tamkeen*, deal with ideal Islamic women, and exploit changes in Saudi Arabia to carry out the identity work tasks through branding themselves for professional purposes. The redefinition tasks represented characteristics of Saudi women as change-makers through their initiatives to interpret the ideology and produce strategies; they move from 'we' as a collective

identity to ‘we’ as change-makers with a professional identity through online personal branding. Professional women’s identity work on LinkedIn emphasises the critical role of professional Saudi women as change-makers. Through either the facilitation or impediments of the situational influences “we and me” that Saudi women face, they do their identity work tasks. The tasks include moving from private/ home to public/professional, from segregation to communication and networking and from veiling to a visual identity, whether it is a personal photo or personal logo, all through their online personal branding as change-makers. Online personal branding practices that are embedded from their personal identity the “me identity situation” and the identity work tasks that are embedded in the role of a change-maker lead to the “we identity situation” of professional identity construction for Saudi women in an ongoing process. This process was successfully completed through three outcomes: (1) overcoming online tensions, (2) the need to become *Nessa’ Mumaknat*, and (3) reforming the ideal femininity of women’s professional identity. For all three outcomes, the identity work considers ideology and produces strategies that support professional identity construction. Previous studies in identity work (Ibarra, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011) have helped form this research model. This study provided a deeper understanding of the reforming tasks by identifying the situational influences in the process of identity construction.

Figure 7.1 outlines the analysis contains several interesting factors that drive identity work and produce different experiences in professional identity construction, including the impact of collective identity on online personal branding. The figure also shows how situational influences in professional identity construction can facilitate or impede both online personal branding practices and identity work tasks.

Ongoing professional identity construction for professional Saudi women

Saudi women in this research have lifestyles, social norms, and beliefs that direct their identity construction, but they also have ways of coping with difficulties. They are used to doing their best in balancing their wants and needs on one hand and the expectations of society on the other. This position on how Saudi women face their nature of society and how they deal with their status in society is hardly new. Indeed, the situation it describes has become a lifestyle among Saudi women (Altorki, 1986; Arebi, 1994; Mustafa & Troudi, 2019).

Overcoming online tensions

This thesis analysed the online tensions of identity work in online personal branding on LinkedIn by dividing the tensions into two kinds: LinkedIn feature tensions such as profile, summary, and connections and sociocultural norm tensions such as feeling shy and facing surveillance and stereotyping. The tensions revealed how online personal branding practices affect Saudi women in a specific gendered and cultural context. An in-depth interpretation of online tensions results in two main outcomes: perceptions and strategies of Saudi women for dealing with and overcoming online tensions to construct a professional identity. First, as to perceptions of Saudi women, they consider society, family, sociocultural norms, other Saudi women online, and themselves. In a study of identity tensions in the networked era, Davis (2012) analysed identity conceptions of young people both online and offline by summarising a framework of the strategies used to reconcile the tensions between multiplicity and consistency. The framework contains four major categories called the framework of obligation spheres. The first category is the self, the second is the interpersonal relationship, the third is online social norms, and the fourth is broad community-level values and behavioural standards. These four major categories work as implicit criteria that individuals use to different degrees

to identify their online multiplicity limits. This study's strategies for reconciling identity tensions encouraged me to consider this framework in discussing Saudi women's experience of overcoming online tensions. However, perceptions of Saudi women in dealing with tensions are arranged in the opposite order starting, with broad, community-level values and ending with the self, see Figure 7.2.

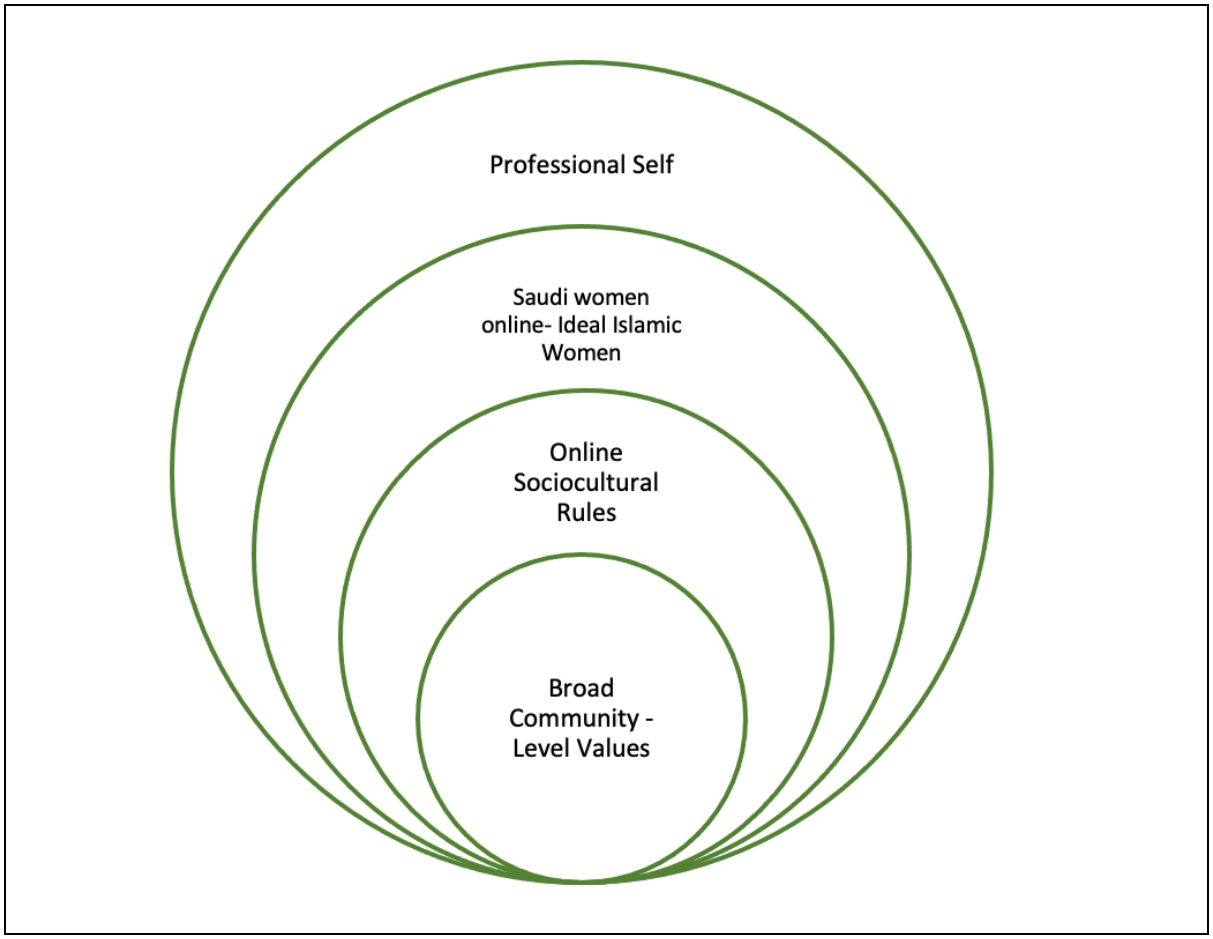


Figure 7.2: Spheres of obligation for professional Saudi women on LinkedIn

Based on Davis (2012) framework, I consider the first category to be the broad community – Saudi Arabia's collectivist, conservative culture and society – and change the social norms from Davis (2012) to online sociocultural norms, which come second. I modified the interpersonal relations in Davis (2012) to: become Saudi women online in relation to notion of the ideal Islamic woman as the third category. Finally, the self in Davis (2012) becomes the

professional self in my research context. In Davis (2012) framework, individuals' focus is more likely to be on their personal well-being, with the broader community's welfare coming next, whereas my analysis shows that Saudi women focus on the broader community first in their perceptions of dealing with tensions, then on themselves. Even though the self in my research is the last category, it plays an important role in negotiating, managing and work on identity. As it is a professional self, the analysis shows that, in their many times constructing and reconstructing their professional identity, Saudi women are willing to ignore certain feelings or restrictions and relax some sociocultural norms to achieve their professional goals.

The second finding of the in-depth interpretation of online tensions is the strategies of Saudi women in dealing with those tensions. It is important to note that the strategies of dealing with online tensions are an extension of who they are in real life. Women negotiate with the ideology they are faced with to modify it strategically (Altorki, 1986). They do not usually fight to get what they want or create the reality they seek; instead, they follow a win-win strategy that provides them with their preferred life. Arebi (1994) explains on how Saudi women writers position themselves in the discourses of their own society and policies regarding the functions of women in society, "Saudi women writers 'wage peace' rather than war, not by romanticizing harmony but rather by formulating the social conditions that would allow for justice and more equitable relations between men and women" (p. 297). A similar strategy is reported by Mustafa and Troudi (2019), who called it "agency manoeuvres":

> The Saudi women participants exercised what we call "agency maneuvers", where on one hand, participants wilfully subjected themselves to the ideas and practices of their society, considered by feminist scholars as subordination. On the other hand, the participants resisted and strategically exercised their agency so as to comply with society norms and Sharia'a parameters (p. 136).

The agency manoeuvres result in a particular form of an agency called "compliant agency" (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019, p. 136), which is a strategy Saudi women use to overcome online tensions. This kind of agency does not mean that Saudi women comply completely with sociocultural rules; rather, they adopt a religious interpretation that grants them the ability to act as they want (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019). Ultimately, the most effective strategies offer professional women spaces of agency that also give due consideration to sociocultural norms. These strategies conclude the discussion of the tensions felt by Saudi women in sociocultural identity work through online personal branding on LinkedIn.

The sociocultural identity work of Saudi women during online personal

Analysing identity work for professional Saudi women explains the experiences of constructing their professional identity through online personal branding on LinkedIn. The sociocultural identity work of Saudi women during online personal branding is steered by three key factors. First is the impact of the sociocultural rules around veiling and gender segregation. Second is the domination of guardianship by both the immediate and the extended family. Finally, there is the impact of ideal femininity on being Saudi women: their national identity, online characteristics for women and 'being Saudi women' in comparison to men. In each sociocultural factor, Saudi women experience a form of identity work to carry out online personal branding in a professional fashion. Each form of identity work takes experiences of women in relation to their cultural, social, and gendered background. However, Saudi women's experience of identity work in a sociocultural context, in the broadest view, is searching for the optimal balance in identity (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Identity work of Saudi women from a collectivist, conservative and masculine culture and society is a function of their sociocultural identity work. In their experiences of branding themselves, Saudi women are in two situations; on the one hand, they want to express their individuality, 'me', by creating a professional identity. On the other is a collective culture, 'we', that is greater than themselves. In other words, their identities consider two main human needs that cause interrelated tensions: the first is the need for inclusion, which means women need to be similar to others. The second is the need for uniqueness, which means women need to be different from others. Considering these two needs together is necessary to prevent dysfunction of identity and enable healthy processes of identity. Here is where the optimal balance functions by practicing inclusion and uniqueness aim to reduce stress and confusion and increase well-being and satisfaction (Kreiner et al., 2006). From the previous section, the discussion demonstrates that personal branding practices for Saudi women involve seeking an optimal balance that helps them navigate in the shadow of their cultural, social, and gendered background. Online personal branding in its professional, cultural, and feminine context expresses the women's negotiation, managing and work identity. In branding themselves on LinkedIn, women consider both situational factors from their sociocultural context and the nature of LinkedIn itself and individual factors that are related to their personal and professional identities. This expresses the women's need for inclusion (Kreiner et al., 2006). At the same time, the need for uniqueness is expressed by their personal branding practices of meeting the demands of professional identity construction. They overcome tensions and use various tactics to differentiate themselves. This is answering the first research question: How do professional Saudi women construct professional identity through online personal branding on LinkedIn? The next section discusses the need for Saudi women to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* in society.

Becoming *Nesaa' Mumaknat*

The LinkedIn culture differs from other social media platforms in that it requires genuine self-identification and accurate personal information to enjoy its benefits (Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2018). According to the previous studies (mentioned in this thesis), Saudi women use social media for negotiating and expressing their identities. Saudi women apply many negotiation tactics such as using nicknames, hiding their personal image, and using only their first names to avoid being known, in the light of gendered, social, and cultural norms in Saudi Arabia (Al-Saggaf, 2011; Guta & Karolak, 2015). However, on LinkedIn, they cannot apply these tactics, as the main reasons for being on that platform are to be known as a professional and present self and qualities.

From analysing the data and questioning their need to have a personal brand, this research shows that through the identity work of online personal branding, Saudi women are in the process of reforming their status as professional women. The status of Saudi women over the years has affected Saudi women in their professional identity. They work on their professional identity to be empowered women (*Nessa' Mumaknat*) and want to have empowerment (*Tamkeen*), as their traditional status in society reflects women as marginalised (*Nessa' Muhamashat*). LinkedIn as a platform, personal branding as a practice and identity work as a strategy revealed their need and desire to be visible and *Mumaknat.* Their sociocultural identity work emphasised Saudi women's desire to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* in their society. This view addresses the second research question that asks why do Saudi women need professional identities?

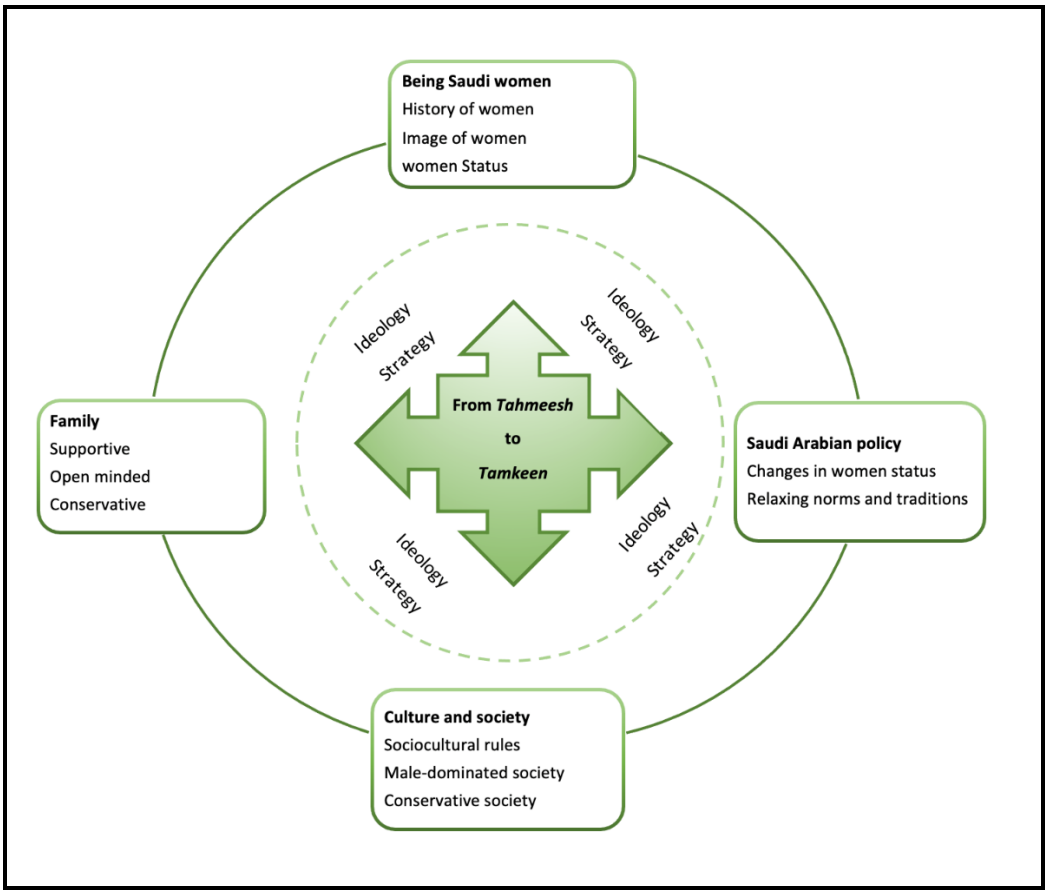


Figure 7.3: The theoretical framework of *Tamkeen Almara'a*

The need for Saudi women to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat*, the present study has found that a strategic plan is required in which women are enabled by their family, guardian, society, and country to challenge social norms to achieve their professional goals as it is shown in Figure 7.3. The levels of *Tamkeen* for Saudi women are a result of their own interpretation of their system of beliefs and ideology; through this system, they determine their behaviour and choose the best strategies to effect dramatic changes in their lives. The performance of doing identity work through personal branding for professional identity construction. This theory of changing ideology through strategies comes from Altorki (1986), who studied the ideology of Saudi women.

The need for Saudi women to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* begins with the ideology they learn as girls; then, they develop strategies to

have *Tamkeen*. There are four factors in women's senses of *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen*. First, is being Saudi women, which involves their history, the image of Saudi women and the status of women in Saudi Arabian society. Second, are Saudi policies, especially the recent changes in the status of Saudi women that have relaxed traditional sociocultural norms and moved women towards *Tamkeen*. Third, is Saudi culture, with its sociocultural restrictions, male-dominated society, and conservativism. Fourth, is the kind of family or guardian, whether supportive and open-minded or conservative, see Figure 7.3.

Women's Empowerment and Tamkeen Almara'ah: Are They Two Sides of the Same Coin?

Studies using the concept of women's empowerment instead of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* showed that Saudi women's empowerment appeared in many meanings; Ramady (2010) states that women's empowerment could allow Saudi women to contribute to economic development. Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq (2016) list the empowerment initiatives for women in Saudi Arabia. These include 1) opportunities in education for younger generations of women and 2) having alternative career options and aspirations to become professional female leaders. In addition, in studies of the challenges facing Saudi women regarding leadership, empowerment is explained in terms of developing the roles of women professionally and enhancing the involvement of women in public. The idea is that this enhancement will be a means to attain the strategic goals of development in Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). As a state of mind, empowerment cannot be fully achieved because women have a lack of agency related to authority. They do not have independence, knowledge or management skills, resulting in their inability to be involved in decision-making processes in Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahmadi, 2011). However, this claim supports the research findings that empowerment, in its Western meaning, is not associated with *Tamkeen Almara'ah* and that it is better to use the concept of *Tamkeen*

Almara'ah rather than when studying the issue in a Middle Eastern context. To be more specific, Al-Ahmadi (2011) concludes her study by discussing the importance of addressing the cultural and structural barriers that prevent Saudi Arabia from moving on because of its current policies on women.

Therefore, it is crucial to address the use of the word "empowerment" in both English and Arabic empirical studies of Saudi women's *Tamkeen* (Al-Ahmadi, 2011; Hoza, 2019; Ramady, 2010; van Geel, 2016). However, there are many Arabic articles in magazines and blogs claiming that the concept of empowering women does not reflect the meaning of *Tamkeen Almara'ah* (Helmy, 2012; Khidr, 2013; Refaai). The articles claim that the more appropriate English term for *Tamkeen Almara'ah* is 'enabling'. Based on the research findings, however, even the concept 'enabling' does not reflect the precise meaning of *Tamkeen Almara'ah*, because 'enable' means to give the opportunity without discussing the process and ideology of doing it, therefore, it is incomplete in meaning and does not reflect all that women's empowerment implies (Mosedale, 2005). It is better to use the Arabic term *Tamkeen Almara'ah* instead of seeking a translation in English, because that language simply does not have a term that fully captures the meaning of empowering women in Middle Eastern context.

Women's empowerment and *Tamkeen Almara'ah* are not two sides of the same coin because the meaning of empowering women in Arabic society, which comes from the word 'power' (استقواء), leads the definition towards a different direction that allows for social conflict between men and women (Helmy, 2012; Khidr, 2013; Refaai). There is evidence of this in the current feminist movement in Arabic societies, which is based on the conflict between genders. More specifically, Hoza (2019) questioned feminism in Saudi Arabian society and whether it is excessive, noting that the feminist movement developed out of a Western context. There has also been a debate about the inappropriateness of the concepts of women's development,

autonomy, and empowerment regarding Arabic women (van Geel, 2016). While the first *Arab Human Development Report* (2002) by the United Nations Development Agency (UNDP) used the terminology of women's empowerment, in a 2005 report written by Arabic scholars, policymakers and practitioners who are entirely devoted to women's positions in the Arab world preferred the descriptive term 'rise of women' (*Alnohudh be Almara'ah*) to talk about women's empowerment (van Geel, 2016).

Therefore, empowerment does not describe the status of women – whether traditional or contemporary – in Saudi Arabia, and thus it is more useful to explain the Arabic and Saudi women's movements from their local culture and knowledge. This study makes the shift from describing the need of Saudi women to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat* to be able to capture their agency, ability, distinctiveness, and achievements, all of which help them shape the kinds of lives they really want to experience. The term 'women's empowerment' is refuted as *Tamkeen Almara'ah* offers a locally sensitised meaning of women's empowerment in a Middle Eastern context. *Tamkeen Almara'ah* considers Saudi women's need to move from being *Nessa' Muhamashat* to becoming *Nessa' Mumaknat*.

Thus, Saudi women navigate their sense of being *Nessa' Mumaknat* through their experience of facing *Tahmeesh*, which they have grown up with due to their status in Saudi Arabian society. Then move toward the desired status as professional Saudi women. Some Saudi women carry the sense of *Tahmeesh* with them in their identity work online, while others take advantage of doing online personal branding in professional platform to navigate their sense of being *Nessa' Mumaknat*. This thesis analysed the meanings of *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen Almara'ah* from the beginning, because the actions of Saudi women and strategies in identity work grew out of their feelings. In their online personal branding, Saudi women negotiate, manage, and then work on their professional identity. They use LinkedIn because of the

combination of their system of beliefs – which arises from their cultural, social, and gender background – in addition to their needs and desires to have a professional identity. Their navigation of *Tahmeesh* and *Tamkeen* steers the specifics of their personal brand and online appearance.

This navigation acts as an initiative for Saudi women to plan and to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*; it is an example of what van Geel (2012) calls "bottom-up initiatives" (p. 74). van Geel finds that bottom-up initiatives are one type of strategy that strengthens *Tamkeen Almara'ah* and allows women to become *Mumaknat* in society. van Geel (2012) defines bottom-up initiatives as three specific strategies: (1) those that come from the women themselves, (2) those that involve individuals or groups that are "reclaiming women," and (3) those that arise from education and political empowerment. These strategies were found in this research interviews of Saudi women desiring to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*.

The second strategy is ensuring a good education for daughters, and women take responsibility for planning that important aim. The purpose of this strategy is not merely the education itself but to make women ready for any opportunities that may arise in Saudi Arabian society (van Geel, 2012). From my perspective, this strategy is effective and has now been activated in Saudi Arabia after major changes in the country and a recent wave of *Tamkeen Almara'ah*. Women who worked on their education and gained professional experience were recognised, chosen to be visible, and participate in decision making. The present study has found that constructing a professional identity through online personal branding is like this strategy of ensuring a good education for girls. Saudi women are willing to develop professional identities using personal brands to capture opportunities by being recognised and available in the professional world.

Finally, the strategy of political empowerment involves increasing awareness of the importance of women participating in political decision-making, an initiative that is carried out by other Saudi women who are aware of this importance (van Geel, 2012). This is a bottom-up initiative for van Geel (2012), because it is carried out by women for other women. The present study is similar, as personal branding raises the awareness of the importance of women having a professional identity. When Saudi women are looking at other Saudi women's LinkedIn accounts to see examples of professional Saudi women, they learn the appropriate way of doing online personal branding. In the present study, Saudi women reported that part of the reason for being on a professional social media platform was to show that there are professional Saudi women and to support other Saudi women by taking the lead to show women's experience online.

Gorbatov et al. (2018) describe personal branding as "a strategic process of creating, positioning and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery" (p. 6). In addition, the present study analysis shows personal branding as a form of identity work and hence, supports "bottom-up initiatives" (van Geel, 2012, p. 74). The Saudi women interviewed here used online personal branding to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. This research also shows that the need for *Tamkeen* is a primary motive for Saudi women to conduct identity work. Lepisto et al. (2015) claim that identity work occurs due to identity motives. Therefore, through online personal branding, Saudi women experience identity work to meet their need to become *Nessa' Mumaknat*. For Saudi women, through identity work they express many types of identity motives that are explained at Lepisto et al. (2015): "continuity, authenticity, distinctiveness, belonging, self-esteem, efficacy, and coherence, and meaning" (p. 17).

Reforming professional femininity

Saudi women express the traditional status in their narrative as their collective identity to perform the transgression, as they collectively participate in renegotiating the definition of acceptable public behaviour (Le Renard, 2014). The way Saudi women reform professional femininity is driven by the necessity to maintain the 'specificities' of Saudi Arabian society. As Le Renard (2014) states, "every change concerning Saudi women is implemented 'with respect for the precepts of Shari'a'" (p. 43), the Islamic law based on the Qur'an. Because of Shari'a, Saudi women consider the ideal Islamic woman in their narrative of constructing professional identity. They perform their professional identity in relation to the traditional social role of Saudi women by interpreting the received ideology and modifying it in a way that Le Renard calls the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (Le Renard, 2014, p. 113), considering their wants and benefits in a professional context.

For generations, Saudi women have lived their lives under the frame of the ideal Islamic woman. As chapter four and six show, ideal femininity was one of the factors that steered their identity work in online personal branding. The narratives of women and construction of their professional identities in this research reflect and navigate the needs of Saudi women and intentions to reform their femininity using their own resources and experiences, not from the historical image that has been drawn for them from Saudi culture, society, regulations, and notion of the ideal Islamic woman. This long-standing ideology in Saudi Arabia put women in a subordinate possession in society, expecting them to protect the tradition of their families, values, and Islamic morality by doing housework. Their opinions were to be determined and revealed through their fathers, brothers, or husbands, and they were to avoid dishonouring their families by working outside the home (Doumato, 1992; Mernissi, 1996). Saudi women who

challenge cultural and societal norms by choosing to work outside their home will be regarded as deviants, as Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, and Rajasekar (2017) state:

> In this collectivist society which makes group conformity paramount and expects individuals to adjust their personal and career aspirations to maintain social order, women who choose to pursue careers outside the home are often perceived as socially deviants "[*sic*]" who challenge cultural traditions (pp. 185–186).

Although this reality is now out of date and the status of women is improving, this shows the pressure that professional Saudi women faced to consider societal expectations in their everyday behaviour. The findings explain how the notion of an ideal Islamic woman impacts professional Saudi women. They do not fully associate as professionals with this ideology from their experience in professions. Still, they are aware of traditional status of Saudi women, and the analysis shows their awareness and affiliation. At the same time, they have every intention to reform the status of women in a professional context. The ideological impact appeared to be a legacy for some women, who consider ideological attributes in their overall descriptions of saying who they are and where they come from and as tensions, they need to deal with or overcome to form the modern ideal Saudi women. This addresses the third research question of what is the impact of collective identity (cultural, social, and gender background) on the attitudes of Saudi women to constructing professional identity and online personal branding?

In addition, Saudi women are committed to reform professional femininity and thus, I conclude by offering a conceptual framework for a model of professional femininity, as is shown in Figure 7.4.

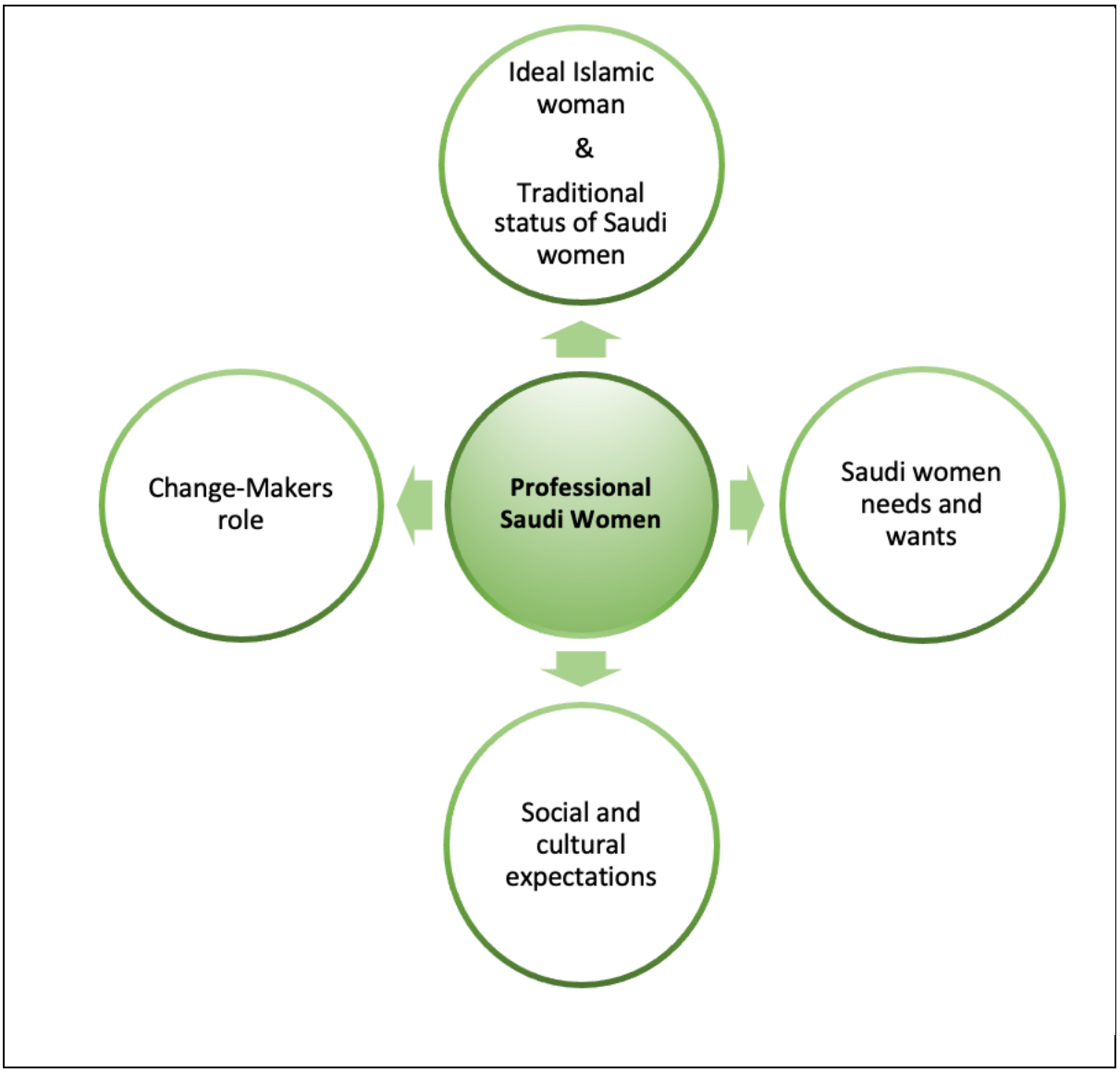


Figure 7.4: Professional Femininity Model

The experiences of Saudi women, along with their fear of not reflecting the ideal Islamic woman when branding themselves on LinkedIn was the impact of ideal femininity that encourages women to examine their negative and positive attitudes regarding LinkedIn as a professional platform and consider private and public aspects when they stigmatised their experience as negative (Ashmore et al., 2004). After evaluating both the negative and positive situations, they form a professional identity while also considering ideal femininity to create a suitable personal brand. They apply content and meaning (Ashmore et al., 2004) practices to create personal brands. They do this by identifying their attributes as women and the ideology

regarding Saudi women, understanding their preferences, and building a narrative (Ashmore et al., 2004) that reflects their professional selves on an individual level within the collective identity and presenting themselves as professional Saudi women who represent Saudi Arabian society.

Saudi women who are affected by ideal femininity do not want to be seen as living outside that notion, which causes them to worry about being stereotyped, misjudged, and categorised. These concerns guide their personal branding practices (as shown in chapter 6). They draw upon collective identification by using the explicit and implicit importance of their identity. The explicit importance appears in their desire to establish professional personas and reflect who they are as ideal Saudi women. Their ways of examining LinkedIn's features are important in relation to how the platform makes them feel about themselves. Relying on the idea of women's ideology, considering their responsibility to represent their national identity, and even considering themselves symbol-bearers (Yuval-Davis, 1997) were included in most of the participants' practices. Some participants were conscious of reflecting on the modern professional version of the ideal Islamic woman by overcoming the obstacles they face in branding themselves online. Others chose to be conservative in their experiences of personal branding. In wanting to avoid conflict and misjudgement, they have chosen to display a basic LinkedIn profile, although they make changes over time. Moreover, the LinkedIn platform for professional Saudi women is seen as a place to explore, construct and promote themselves, to relax sociocultural norms, and to modernise the notion of the ideal Islamic woman to fit a professional context.

According to Khedher (2019), two primary approaches have been used as a theoretical foundation for personal branding. The first uses social and cultural capital notions, building on established organizational fields to seek to understand the personal brand phenomenon. The

second approach considers personal branding to be a self-presentation activity. Using these two approaches to study graduate students, Khedher found that "personal branding is a signifying strategic practice leading to enhanced graduate ability to market themselves in the competitive job market" (Khedher, 2019, p. 107). Since this thesis considers personal branding a form of identity work, it was discovered to be a strategy that helps Saudi women negotiate, manage, and work on their identities. It is a marketing tool that puts Saudi women face-to-face with their professional needs and cultural, social, and gendered backgrounds. Personal branding for Saudi women involves actions and reactions that consist of tensions to deal with or overcome. The author of this thesis believe personal branding is an 'Aha!' moment for Saudi women and makes them search to find their professional selves.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research analysed the professional identity construction of Saudi women on LinkedIn, which revealed the impact of their background in two main outcomes: the first involved identity work tensions, and the second involved factors that steered the identity work during online personal branding. The identity work represents how Saudi women deal with or overcome tensions to ensure the benefits of being online while maintaining consideration of their collective identity, or 'we', in their professional identity construction. The findings go deeper in analysing the real needs of Saudi women to have a professional identity in a way that considers women's status, their gendered identity and recent changes in Saudi Arabia related to women's status and empowerment (*Tamkeen*). The deeper analysis led this study to be more specific about understanding the role and impact of the nature of Saudi culture and society and the notion of the ideal Islamic woman on women's professional identity construction that represents professional Saudi women and their ways of reforming a professional femininity to ensure their own benefit 'me' while respecting societal expectations

'we'. These findings were achieved through analysing the women's identity narrative and performance of constructing professional identity and asking their opinions of the changes occurring in Saudi Arabia related to women's status.

Researching Saudi women's identity construction has certain characteristic aspects. In terms of the background and status of women, it is interesting to observe how Saudi women have experienced sociocultural rules, particularly their status in society, and acted within the ideology of the ideal Islamic woman for decades. This research implements the importance of reform initiatives in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This development encouraged this study to explore the views of women regarding the changes, especially those related to the status of women in professions. After these changes widened the opportunities offered to professional women, the importance of having a professional identity and a personal brand for Saudi women increased. This attribute supports the significance of this thesis because it investigates the construction of professional identity both online and in real life and examines online personal branding in a cultural and gendered context.

Here, the analysis of the experience of Saudi women makes it clear that researching Saudi women's identity means investigating their cultural, social, familial, and national identity before considering their personal identity. At the same time, it is also evident that Saudi women deal with their cultural, social, and gendered reality to achieve their professional goals in a way that puts themselves in the unfamiliar situations of tallying their achievements, developing their careers, looking at how far they have come professionally and learning to show the way to other Saudi women to ensure professional benefits and reform sociocultural norms within society's expectations. Regarding the overall view of the research, the identity of professional Saudi women is a result of three main components: (1) the negotiation of the collective, 'we', and personal, 'me', identities that consider all the cultural, social, and gender aspects of identity

work. (2) The level of *Tamkeen* that the women have at the moment of constructing the identity, and (3) the perspective of ideal femininity women that guide the professional femininity model.

In analysing the identity work of Saudi women during online personal branding, this research captured the LinkedIn culture shock that Saudi women experienced due to the nature of that platform and the tensions they felt. However, this culture shock did not prevent them from building personal brands; rather, it was a revelatory moment that allowed them to know who they are and exactly what they wanted from a professional platform. In other words, it allowed them to negotiate the 'we' situation of collective identity to activate the 'me' as a person when identifying themselves online. Moreover, since this research identifies the main factors that steer identity work – gender segregation and veiling, guardianship and the status of women, and the notion of the ideal Islamic woman, it is important to clarify that impact to show how these factors appear on many different levels and exert a wide range of influences. For Saudi women, identity work tasks involve moving from being restricted to private homes to public professions, from gender segregation and having "Only for women places" in social life (Le Renard, 2008) to complete with communication and networking, and from veiling to an online visual identity whether through a personal photo or a custom-made logo. Being on a professional platform and forming a professional identity as Saudi women shows the critical role that Saudi women play in life, as they represent their family, society, and nation in their identity work.

In thinking of themselves and expressing their identity narrative and performance while building personal brands, Saudi women strive to gain their *Tamkeen* (empowerment) by being on the professional social media platform LinkedIn. Against a long-established backdrop of *Tahmeesh* (marginalisation), this research explains how Saudi women build reputations and expressing their professional qualities in a time that required them to take these actions. Recent

changes in Saudi Arabia have proven the readiness of Saudi women to become *Mumaknat* in their professional lives, as the findings presented in this research have shown.

Being in a collectivist, conservative and masculine culture and society have not prevented Saudi women from constructing professional identities through online personal branding, which is associated with an individualistic culture (Kanai, 2015). More importantly, it has helped Saudi women to increase their recognition in professional situations. It offers Saudi women a chance to negotiate their collective identity and represent themselves as change-makers by reforming the ideal of professional femininity in a way that meets professional requirements of a new Saudi Arabia. This reform occurs with due consideration of the ideal Islamic woman and the traditional status of Saudi women but adopts modern practices that support the notion of Alnuhudh be almara'ah, (the rise of women) (van Geel, 2012). Thus, identity construction for professional Saudi women considers 'we-ness' instead of 'one-ness' (Snow, 2001), as Saudi Arabia is a collectivist culture. The overall image that Saudi women produce and reflect is to "think individually and act collectively". Through this approach, they find ways to a better life without anger or conflict, in what Le Renard (2014) called the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (p. 113). This approach is because they grow up with the responsibility of 'we' instead of the domination and motivation of 'me'. Family, society, and culture have contributed to shaping their lifestyle and supporting their existence in a way that helps them prove themselves to become what they want to be and think and act collectively as change-makers.

The use of LinkedIn to construct a professional identity for Saudi women revealed many outcomes:

- Most participants completed the LinkedIn profile in two to three steps at different points in time due to the nature of LinkedIn as a platform and their lack of experience, which made LinkedIn a new kind of platform for them.
- The most popular tension they were aware of and made them feel different from other women (Szilagyi, 2015) was the personal photo requirement to have a fully complete profile that would help them gain the benefits of being on the platform. In this thesis, this notion is called visual identity, along with the summary, as they could not sum themselves up in a few sentences.
- Considering LinkedIn as a professional platform impacted the online appearance, communication, and networking behaviour of some of the participants, who relaxed social norms and were open to identifying themselves, to participate and engage without concern over whether they were communicating with men or women, unlike with other social media platforms.
- LinkedIn engagement and profile updating practices are driven by two primary considerations: their job satisfaction and their qualifications. For example, if they are not comfortable with their current job or want to find new opportunities, they care more about their accounts. In addition, their lack of understanding and knowledge of the platform, because they were new to LinkedIn, made them insecure or uncomfortable about participating.
- Privacy and surveillance are the most common considerations, conscious or otherwise, for Saudi women in their appearance on a professional social media platform.
- The younger generation of participants use LinkedIn with seemingly endless hopes of improving their online appearance and identification more than the older group, but both use LinkedIn to demonstrate their existence and receive professional recognition.

- Most professional Saudi women in the research used LinkedIn as a promotional medium to express who professional Saudi women are and what they can do in life, to deliver a clear and accurate image to the world about Saudi women, an image the media have misrepresented. This is the overall reflection of LinkedIn usage characteristics for professional Saudi women.

Research contributions and implications

This thesis contributes to the gender and identity construction literature in the Middle Eastern context, particularly Saudi women's studies, in three ways:

First, it views Saudi women beyond the traditional status that is known in society as it is explained in AlMunajjed (1997) by offering a deep interpretation of the experience of Saudi women with identity negotiation, management, and construction at both the online and physical world levels in the professional context. Given the lack of studies on Saudi women in the online professional context, this study explained the online tensions with regards to identity work, and the unique ways women deal and overcome these tensions in a way that ensures their benefit while keeping up with sociocultural norms. In addition to that, through the real experience of building an online personal brand for Saudi women, this research identified the three main factors that steer the identity work experience from personal branding practices, which are the result of the cultural women, social, and gender background as well as their status in Saudi Arabian society. The Saudi women's ways of identity negotiation, management, and work represent the agency of Saudi women in relation to their collectivist and conservative culture and society. This is what Mustafa and Troudi (2019) called "agency manoeuvres" (p. 136).

Second, it adds to the literature on women's empowerment by introducing its meaning in Middle Eastern context, specifically Saudi Arabian women. By interpreting the experience of constructing a professional identity, the need for women's empowerment is apparent under the concept named *Tamkeen Almara'ah* (Quamar, 2016; van Geel, 2012). This thesis suggested the definition of *Tamkeen Almara'ah*. The analysis of narrative and performance of Saudi women in the construction of professional identity revealed the different levels and sources of *Tamkeen* that women have in their professional experiences, whether from their family, society, qualifications, and career or — as it is happening now in Saudi Arabia — from the country. It also shows the ways how Saudi women formed their strategies in professional identity construction by the interpretation of their ideology in a planned dramatical way, which is part of lifestyle on how Saudi women deal with sociocultural norms (Altorki, 1986). It offers a theoretical framework of Saudi women's movement from being *Nessa' Muhamshat* (marginalised) to become *Nessa' Mumaknat* (empowered).

Finally, this research contributes to the studies of Middle Eastern women in the Saudi women's context by offering a clear explanation of the reformation of ideal femininity in a professional context. It reflects the initiatives of Saudi women to reform their status with respect to the traditional status of Saudi women and the notion of ideal Islamic women. The thesis shows who Saudi women are and how they reach their professional needs and deal with a conservative and masculine society. This work adds to the knowledge of identity work by offering online personal practices in the context of gender and culture by explaining four continuous practices for personal branding: gaining recognition, forming a collective mindset, commodification of self, and playing a personal brand character. By identifying the practices, this study identified five types of women's characters in identity work online: (1) the mysterious women, (2) the conservative women, (3) the feminine women, (4) the masculine women, and (5) the sacrificed women. Also, this thesis shows how Saudi women deal with

their collective identity by appearing in their identity construction as change-makers by reforming the ideal professional femininity within the ideal Islamic women in the modern context. This research offers a theoretical framework for a professional ideal of femininity.

The practical implications of this research appear in many important aspects. First, investigating the identity construction of Saudi women in a professional context can be a guide to show who professional Saudi women are. This study revealed specific characteristics and perceptions of Saudi women related to cultural, social, and gender aspects. Second, analysing the experiences of online personal branding of women on a professional platform helps to emphasise the specific approaches involved in Saudi women's usage of professional social media, which could help companies targeting professional Saudi women online, especially with the five types of online women characters that appeared in the analysis. Third, this research suggested four online personal branding practices that can be used as a guide for Saudi women, and Arab women in general, to construct a professional identity. Finally, the LinkedIn platform has become popular in Saudi Arabia in the last two years. The research findings related to identity work tensions can help promote LinkedIn and educate Saudi women about constructing a professional identity and build a personal brand. Notably, the head of LinkedIn in Saudi Arabia Country is a female (Reem Alharbi).

Research limitations and future research

The key research limitation is the size of the research sample, as it is extremely challenging to generate research findings for all Saudi women. Although this research acknowledges the non-homogeneous nature of Saudi women (Mustafa & Troudi, 2019), it will be critical for future research to examine Saudi women in particular professions. For example, the experiences of women in the educational sector will likely differ from the experience of

women working in the medical sector, as they are different professional environments and experiences in relation to gender mixing.

In addition, this thesis suggests three other avenues for future research: the first involves consideration of the changes that are happening in Saudi Arabia, especially those related to women, studying the way in which professional Saudi women relax sociocultural rules, the domination of guardianship, and ideal femininity using a netnography research strategy that uses both LinkedIn and Twitter as the research context. Second, since this research has established *Tamkeen Almara'ah* as a term for women's empowerment, it would be interesting to examine the term in real-world professional situations for Saudi women in organisations. Third, in consideration of the professional ideal of femininity and the definition of Saudi women as change-makers, this study suggests examining the significance of being change-makers as professional Saudi women.

Women in Saudi Arabia are experiencing radical reforms by interpreting their ideology and forming strategies that allow them to relax the sociocultural norms and raise their recognition in the society (Altorki, 1986; Altuwayjiri, 2019; Le Renard, 2014; van Geel, 2012). This study shows how professional Saudi women are becoming *Nessa Mumaknat* to reform professional femininity by exploring the experiences of professional identity construction. The research investigates the experiences by analysing Saudi women's identity work during online personal branding in LinkedIn. Saudi women experience different situations in professional context. These situations allowed them to deal with their cultural, social, and gendered background, and thus, move from being *Nessa' Mumaknat* to *Nessa' Muhamashat*. This thesis shows how Saudi women's situation end with reforming professional femininity by presenting the role of change-makers. As we move forward in today's Saudi Arabia, the future present many options that are associated with the women's needs and wants. The ongoing process of

the professional identity construction in this research reflects the ways in which Saudi women gain their *Tamkeen* and reforming femininity at the time of negotiating their identities with regards to their backgrounds. Considering the changes in Saudi Arabia and the 2030 Vision, the initiatives of Saudi women to reform varies depending on who they are and where they come from.

During the final stages of editing my thesis for submission, I am rearranging my house and packing my luggage to return to my country, Saudi Arabia. My husband left to Saudi Arabia almost five months ago. As a mother, wife, and a daughter from Saudi family, I am preparing my children for a different lifestyle. They grew up in Australia and accustomed to the western cultures which are different to Saudi culture and society. The most painful part of moving back to Saudi Arabia is that the children have been withdrawn from Australian school in the middle of the second term as I submit my thesis of PhD degree. As I return to my university as a lecturer, I know that I must educate women and guardians. During this research, I discovered that Saudi men (i.e., guardians and sons) need education on how to relate to women and girls. Women are the present, we are the future, we contribute to change, and we are the change-makers in the society. This is the feminism of the future because even across our differences, we are all contributing to change. As I am already living in a different life to *Ummi* (my Mother) and *Ibnaty* (my Daughter) are living a different life to myself. It is a practical example of reforming professional femininity by professional Saudi woman. I am gaining my *Tamkeen* through my PhD degree to reform professional femininity.

References

Abdel-Latif, O., & Ottaway, M. (2007). Women in Islamist movements: toward an Islamist model of women's activism. Carnegie Endowment for International peace. Retrieved September 25, 2019, from https://carnegieendowment.org/files/cmec2_women_in_islam_final1.pdf

Abokhodair, N., & Vieweg, S. (2016). Privacy & social media in the context of the Arab Gulf. In Proceedings of the 2016 ACM Conference on Designing Interactive Systems (DIS '16), USA, 672-683. https://doi.org/10.1145/2901790.2901873

Ahmed, D. A. A., Hundt, G. L., & Blackburn, C. (2011). Issues of Gender, Reflexivity and Positionality in the Field of Disability Researching Visual Impairment in an Arab Society. *Qualitative social work, 10(4)*, 467-484. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010370188

Ahmed, L. (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.

Al Eid, A. A. (2015). *The culture of consumption of professional social media: a phenomenological study of online personal branding and womanhood in Australi* (Master's thesis, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia) Retrieved February 26, 2017, from http://hdl.handle.net/1959.14/1070184

Al-Ahmadi, H. (2011). Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia. Human Resource Development International, 14(2), 149-166. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2011.558311

Al-afifi, R. (2015). "Tamkeen Almara'ah" Almustalah Alakther Tadaual wa Alakther Etharah le Al-lagat ["Women's Empowerment" is the most frequently used and most confusing term]. Retrieved May 19, 2020, from https://wlahawogohokhra.com/208/تمكين-المرأة-المصطلح-الأكثر-تداولاً-و/

Al-Asfour, A., Tlaiss, H. A., Khan, S. A., & Rajasekar, J. (2017). Saudi women's work challenges and barriers to career advancement. Career Development International. 22(2), 184-199. https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-11-2016-0200

Al-Hussain F., Al-Marzooq A. (2016) Saudi Men and Women Work Participation: The Use of Wasta to Overcome Sociocultural Barriers. In M. A. Ramady M. (ed.) *The Political Economy of Wasta: Use and Abuse of Social Capital Networking* (pp. 95-113). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-22201-1_7

Al-Kahtani, N. K. M., Ryan, J. J. C. H., & Jefferson, T. I. (2005). How Saudi female faculty perceive internet technology usage and potential. *Information Knowledge Systems Management, 5*(4), 227-243.

Al-Saggaf, Y. (2011). Saudi females on Facebook: An ethnographic study. *International journal of emerging technologies and society, 9*(1), 1-19.

Al-Saggaf, Y., & Begg, M. M. (2004). Online communities versus offline communities in the Arab/Muslim world. *Journal of information, communication and ethics in society, 2*(1), 41-54. https://doi.org/10.1108/14779960480000242

Al-Saggaf, Y., & Williamson, K. (2004). Online communities in Saudi Arabia: Evaluating the impact on culture through online semi-structured interviews. *Forum: Qualitative social research*, 5(3), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-5.3.564

Al-Saggaf, Y., Williamson, K., & Weckert, J. (2002). Online Communities in Saudi Arabia: an ethnographic study. *In Proceedings of the thirteenth Australasian conference on Information Systems ACIS, Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://aisel.aisnet.org/acis2002/62/*

Al-Salem, S. A. (2005*). The impact of the Internet on Saudi Arabian EFL females' self-image and social attitudes* (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, United States). Retrieved June 18, 2018, from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.984.6867&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Alawad, N. (2014). *Mo'awegat Tamkeen Almar'ah Men Hokokoha Alqanonieah Fe Almamlakah Alarabiah Alsaudieah [Obstacles to empowering women from their legal rights in Saudi Arabia]*. Riyadh: King Fahad National Library.

Aldossary, A., While, A., & Barriball, L. (2008). Health care and nursing in Saudi Arabia. *International nursing review, 55*(1), 125-128. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1466-7657.2007.00596.x

Alfurayh, L., & Burns, M. C. (2020). Redefining 'me': identity change among female Saudi study abroad students in Australia. *Journal of gender studies, 29*(5), 558-569. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2019.1707645

Aljuwaiser, G. (2018). Cultural adoption through online practices across social media platforms: the case of Saudi women. *Cyberorient, 12*(1). Retrieved March 17, 2019, from http://shura.shu.ac.uk/23265

Alkhaled, S. (2021). Women's entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia: feminist solidarity and political activism in disguise? *Gender, work & organization*, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12626

Alkhaled, S., & Berglund, K. (2018). 'And now I'm free': Women's empowerment and emancipation through entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and Sweden. *Entrepreneurship & regional development, 30*(7-8), 877-900. https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2018.1500645

Almizr, H. A. (2017). Almara'a Alsa'udiah Men Altahmeesh Ela Altamkeen [Saudi Woman from Marginalization to Empowerment in Education and Employment]. *al-Majallah al-'Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt al-Amnīyah wa-al-Tadrīb, 32*(68), 127-154. https://doi.org/10.12816/0036676

AlMunajjed, M. (1997). *Women in Saudi Arabia Today*. London: Macmillan Press LTD.

Almunajjed, M. (2010). Women's employment in Saudi Arabia: A major challenge. Retrieved March 23, 2019, from http://178.79.131.95/sites/default/files/publication/235.womens_employment_in_saudi_arabia_a_major_challenge.pdf

Alsaggaf, R. M. (2015). *Identity construction and social capital: A qualitative study of the use of Facebook by Saudi women* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester, Leicester, England). Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://leicester.figshare.com/ndownloader/files/18311801

Alsaggaf, R. M. (2019). Saudi women's identities on Facebook: Context collapse, judgement, and the imagined audience. *The Electronic Journal of information systems in developing countries, 85*(2), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1002/isd2.12070

Alshammari, S. (2019). Writing an illness narrative and negotiating identity: A Kuwaiti academic/author's journey. *Life Writing, 16*(3), 431-438. https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2018.1514240

Alsharkh, Y. N. (2012). *The social media effect on the families of the saudi society from the perspective of the youth* (Master's thesis, Arizona State University, Tempe, United States) Retrieved July 20, 2018, from https://core.ac.uk/reader/79563890

Altorki, S. (1977). Family organization and women's power in urban Saudi Arabian society. *Journal of anthropological research, 33*(3), 277-287.

Altorki, S. (1986). *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and behavior among the elite*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Altorki, S. (1988). At home in the field . In S. Altorki & C. F. El-Solh (Eds.), *Arab women in the field: Studying your own society* (pp. 49-68). New York: Syracuse University Press.

Altuwayjiri, N. A. S. (2019). *Exploring young Saudi women's engagement with social media: feminine identities, culture and national image* (Doctoral dissertation, Newcastle University, Newcastle, England). Retrieved October 20, 2019, from http://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/handle/10443/4666

Andrusia, D., & Haskins, R. (2000). *Brand yourself: How to create an identity for a brilliant career*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Arebi, S. (1994). *Women and words in Saudi Arabia: The politics of literary discourse*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Ashforth, B. (2000). *Role transitions in organizational life: An identity-based perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). An organizing framework for collective identity: articulation and significance of multidimensionality. *Psychological bulletin, 130*(1), 80-114. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.1.80

Attewell, P. (1974). Ethnomethodology since Garfinkel. *Theory and society, 1*(2), 179-210.

Bandinelli, C., & Arvidsson, A. (2013). Brand yourself a changemaker! *Journal of macromarketing, 33*(1), 67-71. https://doi.org/10.1177/0276146712465186

Beech, N. (2008). On the nature of dialogic identity work. *Organization, 15*(1), 51-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407084485

Beech, N. (2011). Liminality and the practices of identity reconstruction. *Human relations, 64*(2), 285-302. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710371235

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative research, 15*(2), 219-234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Binsahl, H., & Chang, S. (2012). International Saudi Female students in Australia and social networking sites: what are the motivations and barriers to communication. In Proceedings of ISANA International Academy Association Conference, Retrieved October 20, 2019, from http://isana.proceedings.com.au/docs/2012/isana2012Final00066.pdf

Brems, C., Temmerman, M., Graham, T., & Broersma, M. (2017). Personal branding on Twitter: How employed and freelance journalists stage themselves on social media. *Digital Journalism, 5*(4), 443-459. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1176534

Bridgen, L. (2011). Emotional labour and the pursuit of the personal brand: Public relations practitioners' use of social media. *Journal of media practice, 12*(1), 61-76.

Brooks, A. K., & Anumudu, C. (2016). Identity development in personal branding instruction: Social narratives and online brand management in a global economy. *Adult learning, 27*(1), 23-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/1045159515616968

Charmaz, K. (2000). Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 509-536). London: SAGE Publications.

Chen, C.-P. (2013). Exploring personal branding on YouTube. *Journal of Internet Commerce, 12*(4), 332-347. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332861.2013.859041

Chen, G. M. (2015). Why do women bloggers use social media? Recreation and information motivations outweigh engagement motivations. *New media & society, 17*(1), 24-40. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813504269

Coffey, A. J., Kamhawi, R., Fishwick, P., & Henderson, J. (2013). New media environments' comparative effects upon intercultural sensitivity: A five-dimensional analysis.

International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 37(5), 605-627. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.06.006

Correa, T., Hinsley, A. W., & De Zuniga, H. G. (2010). Who interacts on the Web?: The intersection of users' personality and social media use. *Computers in human behavior, 26*(2), 247-253. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2009.09.003

Coupland, C. (2001). Accounting for change: A discourse analysis of graduate trainees' talk of adjustment. *Journal of management studies, 38*(8), 1103-1119. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00274

Creedon, P. (2014). Women, social media, and sport: Global digital communication weaves a web. *Television & new media, 15*(8), 711-716. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476414530476

Davis, K. (2012). Tensions of identity in a networked era: Young people's perspectives on the risks and rewards of online self-expression. *New media & society, 14*(4), 634-651. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811422430

Deaver, S. (1980). The contemporary Saudi woman. In E. Bourguignon (Ed.), A world of women: Anthropological studies of women in the societies of the world (pp. 19–42). New York, NY: Praeger.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 1-34). London: SAGE Publications.

Dijck, V. J. (2013). 'You have one identity': Performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, culture & society, 35*(2), 199-215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712468605

Dogruer, N., Menevi, I., & Eyyam, R. (2011). What is the motivation for using Facebook? *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences, 15*, 2642-2646. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.04.162

Doumato, E. A. (1992). Gender, monarchy, and national identity in Saudi Arabia. *British Journal of Middle Eastern studies, 19*(1), 31-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530199208705547

Edmiston, D. (2014). Creating a personal competitive advantage by developing a professional online presence. *Marketing education review, 24*(1), 21-24. https://doi.org/10.2753/MER1052-8008240103

Freitas, A., Kaiser, S., Joan Chandler, D., Carol Hall, D., Kim, J. W., & Hammidi, T. (1997). Appearance Management as Border Construction: Least Favorite Clothing, Group Distancing, and Identity Not! *Sociological inquiry, 67*(3), 323-335. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1997.tb01099.x

Gecas, V. (1982). The self-concept. *Annual review of sociology, 8*(1), 1-33. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.08.080182.000245

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Touchstone.

Goffman, E. (1983). The interaction order: American Sociological Association, 1982 presidential address. *American sociological review, 48*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095141

Goffman, E. (1990). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: England Penguin Books.

Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2018). Personal branding: interdisciplinary systematic review and research agenda. *Frontiers in psychology, 9*, 2238. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02238

Goulding, C. (2005). Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research. *European journal of marketing, 39*(3/4), 294-308. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560510581782

Graham, S. (2002). *Build your own life brand!: A powerful strategy to maximize your potential and enhance your value for ultimate achievement*. New York: The Free Press.

Grénman, M., Hakala, U., & Mueller, B. (2019). Wellness branding: insights into how American and Finnish consumers use wellness as a means of self-branding. *Journal of product & brand management*, 28(4), 462-474. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-04-2018-1860

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998). Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 195-220). London: SAGE Publications.

Guillemin, M., & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity, and "ethically important moments" in research. *Qualitative inquiry, 10*(2), 261-280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360

Guta, H., & Karolak, M. (2015). Veiling and blogging: social media as sites of identity negotiation and expression among Saudi women. *Journal of international women's studies, 16*(2), 115-127.

Hacinebioglu, I. L. (2007). A methodological approach to the epistemic classification of knowledge in religious sciences. *Journal of beliefs & values, 28*(3), 235-241.

Hamdan, A. (2005). Women and education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and achievements. *International education journal, 6*(1), 42-64. https://doi.org/10.1080/13617670701712133

Hamdan, A. (2009). Reflexivity of discomfort in insider-outsider educational research. *McGill Journal of education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill, 44*(3), 377-404. https://doi.org/10.7202/039946ar

Harris, L., & Rae, A. (2011). Building a personal brand through social networking. *Journal of business strategy*, 32(5), 14-21. https://doi.org/10.1108/02756661111165435

Hearn, A. (2008). Meat, Mask, Burden: Probing the contours of the brandedself. *Journal of consumer culture, 8*(2), 197-217. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540508090086

Hearn, A. (2011). Confessions of a radical eclectic: Reality television, self-branding, social media, and autonomist Marxism. *Journal of communication inquiry, 35*(4), 313-321. https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859911417438

Helmy, K. (2012). Mafhum Mustalah Tamkin Almar'ah (Women Empowerment) fi Manshah [The concept of the term Women's Empowerment in its origin]. Retrieved May 19, 2020, from http://iicwc.org/lagna/iicwc/iicwc.php?id=1038

Higginbottom, G. M. A. (2004). Sampling issues in qualitative research. *Nurse researcher (through 2013), 12*(1), 7-19. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2004.07.12.1.7.c5927

Hiller, J. (2016). Epistemological foundations of objectivist and interpretivist research. *In B. Wheeler, & K. Murphy (Eds.), Music therapy research* (3rd ed., pp. 236– 268). Dallas, TX: Barcelona Publishers.

Hines, A. (2004). The personal brand in futures. *Foresight*, ,6(1), 60-61. https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680410531570

Hofstede, G., & McCrae, R. R. (2004). Personality and culture revisited: Linking traits and dimensions of culture. *Cross-cultural research, 38*(1), 52-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397103259443

Holbrook, M. B., & O'Shaughnessy, J. (1988). On the scientific status of consumer research and the need for an interpretive approach to studying consumption behavior. *Journal of consumer research, 15*(3), 398-402.

Hoza, J. L. (2019). Is There Feminism in Saudi Arabia? *UF Journal of undergraduate research, 20*(2).

Hvidt, M. (2018). The new role of women in the new Saudi Arabian economy. Retrieved August 10, 2020, from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/156891367.pdf

Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative science quarterly, 44*(4), 764-791. https://doi.org/10.2307/2667055

Ibarra, H. (2004). *Working identity: Unconventional strategies for reinventing your career*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.

Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity as Narrative: Prevalence, Effectiveness, and Consequences of Narrative Identity Work in Macro Work Role Transitions. *Academy of management review, 35*(1), 135-154. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.1.zok135

Ibarra, H., & Petriglieri, J. L. (2010). Identity work and play. *Journal of organizational change management*, 23(1),10-25. https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811011017180

Kanai, A. (2015). WhatShouldWeCallMe? Self-branding, individuality and belonging in youthful femininities on Tumblr. *M/C Journal, 18*(1). https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.936

Karaduman, I. (2013). The effect of social media on personal branding efforts of top level executives. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences, 99*, 465-473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.515

Karam, A. (1998). *Women, Islamism, and the State: contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*. New York: ST.Martin's Press, INC.

Karim, J. (2009). *American Muslim women: Negotiating race, class, and gender within the Ummah*. New York: New York University Press.

Kenny, M., & Fourie, R. (2015). Contrasting classic, Straussian, and constructivist grounded theory: methodological and philosophical conflicts. *The qualitative report, 20*(8), 1270-1289.

Khedher, M. (2014). Personal branding phenomenon. *International journal of information, business and management, 6*(2), 29-40.

Khedher, M. (2019). Conceptualizing and researching personal branding effects on the employability. *Journal of brand management, 26*(2), 99-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2013.811609

Khidr, A. I. (2013, 10 October 2019). Haqiqat Mafhum Tamkeen Almar'ah [The reality of the concept of women's empowerment]. *Alukah.* Retrieved June 29, 2020, from https://www.alukah.net/web/khedr/0/53818/

Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons, 54*(3), 241-251. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.005

Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C., & Sheep, M. L. (2006). Where is the 'me' among the 'we'? Identity work and the search for optimal balance. *Academy of management journal, 49*(5), 1031-1057. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2006.22798186

Labrecque, L. I., Markos, E., & Milne, G. R. (2011). Online personal branding: Processes, challenges, and implications. *Journal of interactive marketing, 25*(1), 37-50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2010.09.002

Lair, D. J., Sullivan, K., & Cheney, G. (2005). Marketization and the recasting of the professional self: The rhetoric and ethics of personal branding. *Management communication quarterly, 18*(3), 307-343. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318904270744

Le Renard, A. (2008). "Only for women:" Women, the state, and reform in Saudi Arabia. *The Middle East journal, 62*(4), 610-629. https://doi.org/10.3751/62.4.13

Le Renard, A. (2014). *A society of young women: opportunities of place, power, and reform in Saudi Arabia*. California: Stanford University Press.

Lefdahl-Davis, E. M., & Perrone-McGovern, K. M. (2015). The cultural adjustment of Saudi women international students: A qualitative examination. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology, 46*(3), 406-434. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022114566680

Lepisto, D. A., Crosina, E., & Pratt, M. G. (2015). Identity work within and beyond the professions: Toward a theoretical integration and extension. In A. M. C. e. Silva & M. T. Aparicio (Eds.), *International Handbook of Professional Identity* (pp. 11- 37). USA: Scientific & Academic Publishing.

Lincoln , Y. S., & Guba , E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage Publication Inc.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). London: SAGE Publications.

Lipsky, G. A. (1959). *Saudi Arabia: its people, its society, its culture*. . New Haven, Conn, Hraf Press.

Louis, M. R. (1980). Career Transitions: Varieties and Commonalities. *Academy of Management Review, 5*(3), 329-340. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1980.4288836

Luk, J. C. (2008). Classroom discourse and the construction of learner and teacher identities. In A. M. d. M. M. Martin-Jones, & N. H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 121-134): Springer.

Mauthner, N. S., & Doucet, A. (2003). Reflexive accounts and accounts of reflexivity in qualitative data analysis. *Sociology, 37*(3), 413-431. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385030373002

McAlpine, L. (2016). Why might you use narrative methodology? A story about narrative. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri. Estonian journal of education, 4*(1), 32-57. https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2016.4.1.02b

McCance, T. V., McKenna, H. P., & Boore, J. R. P. (2001). Exploring caring using narrative methodology: an analysis of the approach. *Journal of advanced nursing, 33*(3), 350-356. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2001.01671.x

McNally, D., & Speak, K. D. (2002). *Be your own brand: A breakthrough formula for standing out from the crowd*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Mernissi, F. (1996). *Women's rebellion & Islamic memory*. London: Zed Books.

Metcalfe, B. D. (2011). Women, empowerment and development in Arab Gulf States: a critical appraisal of governance, culture and national human resource development (HRD) frameworks. *Human resource development international, 14*(2), 131-148. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2011.558310

Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Patriarchy in transition: Women and the changing family in the Middle East. *Journal of comparative family studies, 35*(2), 137-162. https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.35.2.137

Morgan, M. (2011). Personal branding: Create your value proposition. *Strategic Finance, 93*(2), 13-14, 60.

Mosedale, S. (2005). Assessing women's empowerment: towards a conceptual framework. *Journal of international development, 17*(2), 243-257. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1212

Mtango, S. (2004). A state of oppression? Women's rights in Saudi Arabia. *Asia-Pacific journal on human rights and the law, 5*(1), 49-67. https://doi.org/10.1163/1571815043075166

Mustafa, R. F. (2017). *The Impact of Learning English as a Foreign Language on the Identity and Agency of Saudi Women* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter, Exeter, England). Retrieved October 20, 2019, from http://hdl.handle.net/10871/29657

Mustafa, R. F., & Troudi, S. (2019). Saudi Arabia and Saudi Women in Research Literature: A Critical Look. *Asian social science, 15*(2), 133-141. https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v15n2p133

Newsom, V. A., & Lengel, L. (2012). Arab Women, Social Media, and the Arab Spring: Applying the framework of digital reflexivity to analyze gender and online activism. *Journal of international women's studies, 13*(5), 31-45.

Nolan, L. (2015). The impact of executive personal branding on non-profit perception and communications. *Public relations review, 41*(2), 288-292. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.11.001

Oshan, M., & S. (2007). *Saudi women student and the internet: Gender and culture issues* (Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University, Loughborough, England). Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://hdl.handle.net/2134/7906

Oswick, C., & Robertson, M. (2007). Personal branding and identity: a textual analysis. In Alison Pullen, Nic Beech, & David Sims (Eds.), *Exploring Identity: concepts and methods* (pp. 26-43). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Paasonen, S. (2002). Gender, identity, and (the limits of) play on the Internet. In *Women and Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency and Identity.* (pp. 21-43). New York: Peter Lang.

Papacharissi, Z. (2009). The virtual geographies of social networks: a comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. *New media & society, 11*(1-2), 199-220. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808099577

Papacharissi, Z. (2012). Without you, I'm nothing: Performances of the self on Twitter. *International journal of communication, 6*, 1998-2006.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation tool*(4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Peregrin, T. (2012). LinkedIn profile makeover: optimizing your professional online profile. *Journal of the academy of nutrition and dietetics, 112*(1), 23-25. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2011.11.006

Peters, T. (1997). The brand called you. Retrieved April 18, 2016, from http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/10/brandyou.html.

Pharaon, N. A. (2004). Saudi women and the Muslim state in the twenty-first century. *Sex roles, 51*(5-6), 349-366. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SERS.0000046618.62910.ef

Piela, A. (2013). *Muslim women online: faith and identity in virtual space*. London: Routledge.

Pullen, A., 2006. Managing identity. In Managing Identity (pp. 1-13). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Quamar, M. M. (2016). Sociology of the veil in Saudi Arabia: Dress code, individual choices, and questions on women's empowerment. *Digest of Middle East studies, 25*(2), 315-337. https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12085

Ramady, M. A. (2010). *The Saudi Arabian economy: Policies, achievements, and challenges* (2nd ed.).New York: Springer.

Rangarajan, D., Gelb, B. D., & Vandaveer, A. (2017). Strategic personal branding—And how it pays off. *Business Horizons, 60*(5), 657-666. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2017.05.009

Refaai, L. A. Tamkeen Almara'ah Ishkalyt Mustalih Wa waeurat Tanfith ["Women's Empowerment" Problematic term and rugged implementation]. Retrieved from https://midan.aljazeera.net/miscellaneous/2017/2/26/تمكين-المرأة-إشكالية-مصطلح-ووعورة-تنفيذ

Reynolds, M. (2013). *Personal branding with social media*: eBookIt. com.

Sandıkcı, Ö., & Jafari, A. (2013). Islamic encounters in consumption and marketing. *Marketing theory*, 13(4), 411-420. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593113502881

Sarnou, D. (2014). Narratives of Arab anglophone women and the articulation of a major discourse in a minor literature. *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural journal (IS), 16*(1), 65-81.

Saudi Press Agency. (2020, Feb 20). Saudi Press: Riyadh is Capital of Arab women for 2020. https://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=en&newsid=2033582

Schau, J. H., & Gilly, M. C. (2003). We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space. *Journal of consumer research, 30*(3), 385-404. https://doi.org/10.1086/378616

Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of Qualitative Research (pp. 118-137). London: SAGE Publications.

Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English language teaching, 5*(9), 9-16.

Shalhoub, H. A. R. S. (2015). Aba'ad Tamkeen Almar'ah Alsa'udiah: Derassah Masheeiah Men Wejhat Nadhar Ayenah Men A'adha'a Majles Alshora Wa Ayenah Men A'adha'a Haya't Altadrees Fe Ba'adh Aljame'at Alsaudiah [The Dimensions of Empowering Saudi Women: A Survey Study from the Perspective of a Sample of Shura Council Members and a Sample of Teaching Staff at Some Saudi Universities]. *al-Majallah al-'Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt al-Amnīyah wa-al-Tadrīb, 33*(70), 3-39. doi:10.26735/13191241.2017.001

Shaya, N., & Abu Khait, R. (2017). Feminizing leadership in the Middle East: Emirati women empowerment and leadership style. *Gender in management: An international journal, 32*(8), 590-608. https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2016-0143

Slay, H. S., & Smith, D. A. (2011). Professional identity construction: Using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human relations, 64*(1), 85-107. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710384290

Smith, J. K. (1983). Quantitative versus qualitative research: An attempt to clarify the issue. *Educational researcher, 12*(3), 6-13. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X012003006

Smythe, W. E., & Murray, M. J. (2000). Owning the story: Ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics & Behavior, 10*(4), 311-336. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327019EB1004_1

Snow, D. (2001). Collective identity and expressive forms. Retrieved April 18, 2020, from https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zn1t7bj

Snow, D., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American journal of sociology, 92*(6), 1336-1371. https://doi.org/10.1086/228668

Song, J. (2019). "She Needs to Be Shy!": Gender, Culture, and Nonparticipation Among Saudi Arabian Female Students. *TESOL Quarterly, 53*(2), 405-429.

Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. *Journal of consumer research, 21*(3), 491-503. https://doi.org/10.1086/209413

Spillane, M. (2000). *Branding yourself: How to look, sound and behave your way to success*. London: Pan Books.

Stiehm, J. (1976). Algerian women: Honor, survival, and Islamic socialism. In LB Iglitzin & R. Ross (Eds.), *Women in the world: a comparative study* (pp. 229-241). Santa Barbara: CLIO Books.

Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. Ottawa: Benjamin/ Cummings Publishing Co.

Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human relations, 56*(10), 1163-1193. https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267035610001

Syed, J., Ali, F., & Hennekam, S. (2018). Gender equality in employment in Saudi Arabia: a relational perspective. *Career development international., 23*(2), 163-177. https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-07-2017-0126

Szilagyi, A. (2015). "I Am Different From Other Women In The World" The Experiences Of Saudi Arabian Women Studying Online In International Master Programmes. *European journal of open, distance and e-Learning, 18*(1), 85-98.

Szmigin, I., & Foxall, G. (2000). Interpretive consumer research: how far have we come? *Qualitative Market Research: An international journal, 3*(4), 187-197. https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750010349288

Thomas, R., & Linstead, A. (2002). Losing the plot? Middle managers and identity. *Organization, 9*(1), 71-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840291004

Thomson, M. C. (2015). Saudi women leaders: challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Arabian studies, 5*(1), 15-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2015.1050880

Thompson, S. H., & Lougheed, E. (2012). Frazzled by Facebook? An exploratory study of gender differences in social network communication among undergraduate men and women. *College student journal, 46*(1), 88-99.

Tifferet, S., & Vilnai-Yavetz, I. (2018). Self-presentation in LinkedIn portraits: common features, gender, and occupational differences. *Computers in human behavior, 80*, 33-48. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.10.013

Vallas, S. P., & Cummins, E. R. (2015). Personal branding and identity norms in the popular business press: Enterprise culture in an age of precarity. *Organization Studies, 36*(3), 293-319. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840614563741

van Geel, A. (2012). Whither the Saudi woman? Gender mixing, empowerment and modernity. In R. Meijer & P. Aarts (Eds.), *Saudi Arabia between conservativism, accommodation and reform* (pp. 57–78). The hague: Netherlands institute of international relations 'Clingendael: JSTOR.

van Geel, A. (2016). Separate or together? Women-only public spaces and participation of Saudi women in the public domain in Saudi Arabia. *Contemporary Islam, 10*(3), 357-378. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-015-0350-2

Vosloban, R. I. (2013). Employee's personal branding as a competitive advantage: A managerial approach. *The international journal of management science and information technology*, 10, 147-159.

Walsham, G. (2006). Doing interpretive research. *European journal of information systems, 15*(3), 320-330. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000589

Watson, T. J. (2008). Managing identity: Identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances. *Organization, 15*(1), 121-143. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407084488

Watson, T. J. (2009). Narrative, life story and manager identity: A case study in autobiographical identity work. *Human relations, 62*(3), 425-452. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708101044

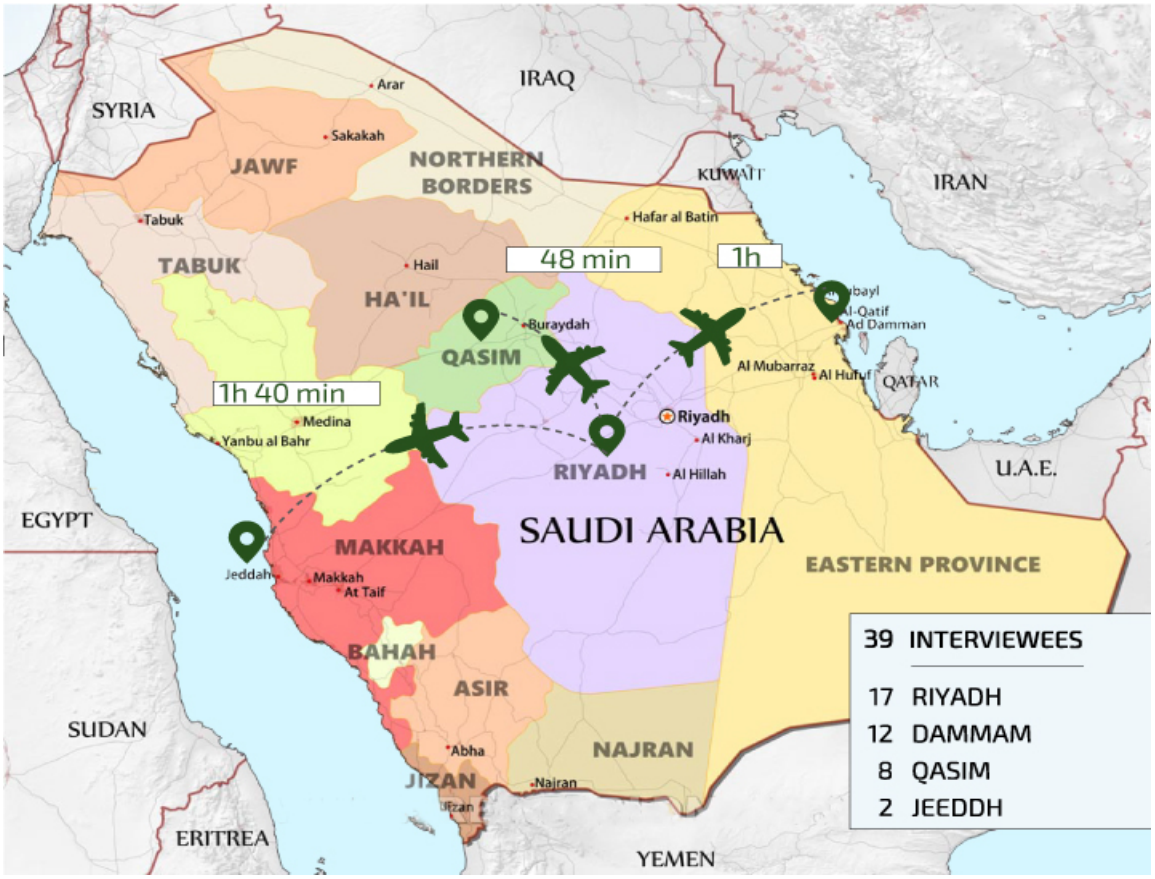
Weisgerber, C., & Butler, S. H. (2016). Debranding Digital Identity: Personal Branding and Identity Work in a Networked Age. *International journal of interactive communication systems and technologies (IJICST), 6*(1), 17-34. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJICST.2016010102

Yamani, M. (2005). The challenge of globalization in Saudi Arabia. In F. Nouraie & Simone (Eds.), *On shifting ground: Middle eastern women in the global era* (pp. 80-90). New York, NY: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York.

Yuval-Davis, N. (1997). Gender and nation. London: Sage.

Appendices

Appendix 1: A map for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the number of research interviewees from each city.



Appendix 2: Research participants as pseudonyms with actual details.

Age	Marital Status	Group	Employment status and specialty	Where in KSA
33	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Project manager engineer	Dammam
24	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	business logistics	Riyadh
23	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Marketer	Dammam
30	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Employee	Riyadh
27	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	A freelancer	Riyadh
24	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Employee	Dammam
25	Married	Doesn't cover / Can	Economic researcher	Riyadh
46	Married	Doesn't cover / Can	HR	Riyadh
35	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Branch manager/ Bank	Dammam
24	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Employee	Dammam
34	Married	Doesn't cover / Can	Fashion designer	Jeddah
23	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Employee	Riyadh
36	Married	Doesn't cover / Can	Medical doctor	Riyadh
23	Single	Doesn't cover / Can	Marketer	Dammam
29	Single	Doesn't cover / Can't	Accountant	Jeddah
23	Single	Doesn't cover / Can't	Employee	Dammam
37	Single	Doesn't cover / Can't	Employer	Riyadh
35	Single	Doesn't cover / Can't	Medical doctor	AL Qassim
23	Single	Doesn't cover / Can't	Marketer	Riyadh
30	Married	Doesn't cover / Can't	Businesswoman	Riyadh
	Married	Doesn't cover / Can't	Branch manager/ Bank	Dammam
37	Married	Doesn't cover / Can't	Businesswoman	Riyadh
24	Single	Cover	A part time employee / A freelancer	Dammam
32	Married	Cover	Teacher	AL Qassim
31	Single	Cover	Employee	Dammam
43	Married	Cover	Teacher	AL Qassim
31	Married	Cover	Trainer	Riyadh
	Single	Cover	Employee	AL Qassim
29	Single	Cover	Employee	Dammam
35	Married	Cover	Medical doctor	Riyadh
26	Married	Cover	Employer	AL Qassim
30	Single	Cover	Psychotherapist	Riyadh
30	Single	Cover	Businesswoman	AL Qassim
43	Divorced	Cover	Employee	AL Qassim
30	Married	Cover	Fashion designer	Riyadh
32	Single	Cover	Employee	Riyadh
31	Single	Cover	Academic and self-development trainer	AL Qassim
35	Single	Cover	Employee	Dammam

Appendix 3: Participants' thankyou letter translated

My Dear,

First, I would like to thank you.

My gratitude extends beyond the sky and the earth.

Thank you so much for participating in my research, and thank you for your time, tenderness and honesty.

Thank you for sharing with me your success story, your struggles and your uniqueness in life.

I would like to explain why your contribution has been so much more than routine participation in a normal research project.

You have contributed to the fulfillment of a 14-year-old dream, and you have done so with all kindness, credibility and pleasure.

Your generosity allowed me to develop research content regarding women's issues both in general and in a Saudi context.

Through your participation, you have played a role in my love of research and in my achievement and success.

You have contributed to the great pleasure, happiness and pride I take in my research journey.

I am truly proud of what you have done so far.

I believe that you can achieve your own dreams and fulfil them easily.

My prayers and love protect you

Best regard

AAYAD AL EID

2018

Appendix 4: Ethics approval

MACQUARIE University

AAYAD ALEID <aayad.aleid@students.mq.edu.au>

ethics application (5201701181)

3 messages

FBE Ethics <fbe-ethics@mq.edu.au> Wed, Jan 31, 2018 at 9:38 AM
To: David Rooney <david.rooney@mq.edu.au>
Cc: Ross Gordon <ross.gordon@mq.edu.au>, AAYAD ALEID <aayad.aleid@students.mq.edu.au>, FBE Ethics <fbe-ethics@mq.edu.au>, Nikola Balnave <nikki.balnave@mq.edu.au>

Dear Professor Rooney

Re application entitled: Online Personal Branding and Saudi Muslim Professional Women: A Qualitative Study

Reference Number: 5201701181

The above application was reviewed by the Faculty of Business & Economics Human Research Ethics Sub Committee. Approval of the above application is granted, effective "30/1/2018". This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Professor David Rooney

Associate Professor Ross Gordon

Mrs Aayad AL Eid

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 30 January 2019
Progress Report 2 Due: 30 January 2020
Progress Report 3 Due: 30 January 2021
Progress Report 4 Due: 30 January 2022
Final Report Due: 30 January 2023